DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 090 SP 039 566

AUTHOR Kosmoski, Georgia J.; Pollack, Dennis R.
TITLE Managing Conversations with Hostile Adults: Strategies for Teachers.
ISBN ISBN-0-8039-6811-6
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 129p.
AVAILABLE FROM Corwin Press, Inc., A Sage Publications Company, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218; Tel: 805-499-9774; Fax: 800-4-1-SCHOOL; E-mail: order@corwinpress.com; Web site: http://www.corwinpress.com ($21.95).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Anger; Codes of Ethics; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interpersonal Relationship; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Resistance (Psychology); Sexual Harassment; Substance Abuse; *Teachers
IDENTIFIERS Coercive Behavior; Gossip

ABSTRACT

This book is designed to help teachers deal with hostile adults, drawing from the experiences of over 250 practicing teachers. The book begins with data from a 2-year study that includes surveys and in-depth interviews with practicing teachers and certified school support professionals from diverse schools. Each chapter contains 10 sections: the story; how taxing such encounters are; the psychological perspective of the situation; a practitioner's view; a clinical view; additional suggestions; other cases in which the learned techniques apply; summary; suggested readings; and references. The chapters are: (1) "Dealing with the Angry Screamer"; "Dealing with Public Humiliation"; "Handling Parents with Blinders"; "Neutralizing a Person Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol"; "Refusing to be Coerced"; "Confronting a Colleague Who Steals Your Work"; "Surviving a False Sexual Accusation"; "Curbing the School Gossip"; "Reversing a Nonsupportive Action"; and "What Works: The 15 Most Often Used Strategies for Difficult, Frustrating, and Hostile Conversations." The teachers' code of ethics is appended. (Chapters contain references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 090

Managing Conversations with Hostile Adults: Strategies for Teachers.

Georgia J. Kosmoski
Dennis R. Pollack

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Alkema

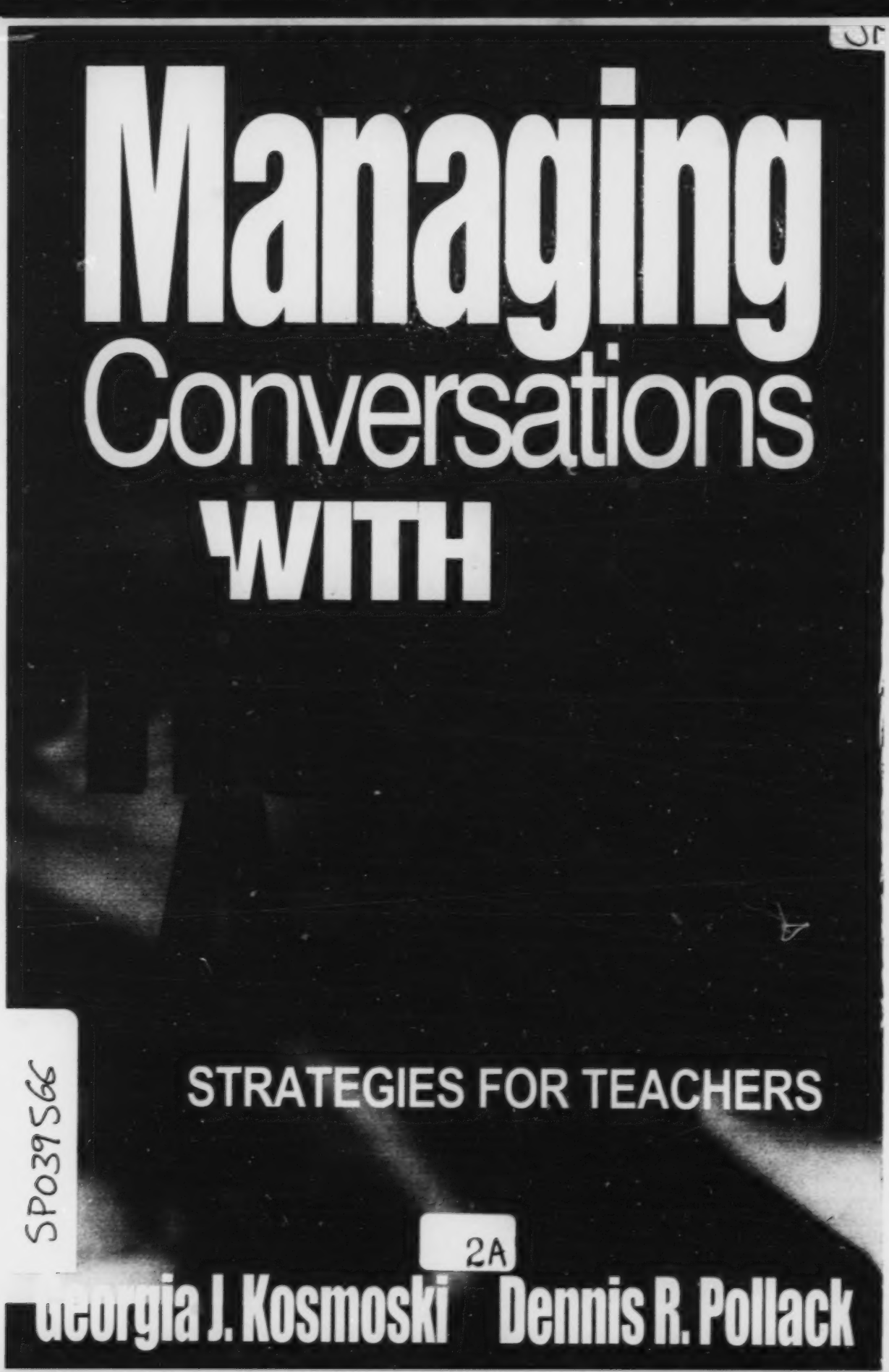
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

SP 039566

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Managing Conversations WITH



STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

SP039566

2A

Georgia J. Kosmoski Dennis R. Pollack

Managing Conversations WITH Hostile Adults

Managing Conversations WITH Hostile Adults

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

Georgia J. Kosmoski ◇ Dennis R. Pollack

CORWIN PRESS, INC.
A Sage Publications Company
Thousand Oaks, California

-UU 4

Copyright © 2001 by Corwin Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information:

Corwin Press, Inc.
A Sage Publications Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@corwinpress.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kosmoski, Georgia J.
Managing conversations with hostile adults: Strategies for teachers / by Georgia J. Kosmoski and Dennis R. Pollack
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.)
ISBN 0-8039-6810-8 (cloth: acid-free paper)
ISBN 0-8039-6811-6 (pbk.: acid-free paper)
1. Conflict management—United States. 2. Communication in education—United States. I. Pollack, Dennis R. II. Title.
LB3011.5 .K66 2000
371.5—dc21 00-009202

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

01 02 03 04 05 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Corwin Editorial Assistant: Kylee Liegl
Production Editor: Nevair Kabakian
Editorial Assistant: Candice Crosetti
Typesetter/Designer: Barbara Burkholder

Contents

	Preface	vii
	Dedication	xiii
	About the Authors	xv
1.	Defusing the Angry Screamer	1
2.	Dealing With Public Humiliation	12
3.	Handling Parents With Blinders	23
4.	Neutralizing a Person Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol	33
5.	Refusing to Be Coerced	45
6.	Confronting a Colleague Who Steals Your Work	56
7.	Surviving a False Sexual Accusation	65
8.	Curbing the School Gossip	77
9.	Reversing a Nonsupportive Action	87
10.	What Works: The 15 Most Often Used Strategies for Difficult, Frustrating, and Hostile Conversations	98
	Resource A: The Teachers' Code of Ethics	108

Preface

Today's teachers are finding that hostile conversations with adults in school settings are becoming more commonplace and more intense. These conversations range from annoying situations in the faculty lounge where peers whine and gripe, to distasteful confrontations with overbearing supervisors, to incidents in which parents or community members loudly harangue us at public meetings, to encounters with out-of-control individuals under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Tragedies such as the series of fatal shootings in a half dozen schools have made us mindful of our precarious position. But what actions should we take to reduce the risk, safeguard the schools, and effectively communicate with those who are hostile to us? Consider the following vignette.

While enjoying coffee with our friend Jeff, an industrial arts teacher at a large suburban high school, we listened as he related an unnerving incident that had happened to him a few days earlier. Jeff explained that as he was leaving the school building, he was confronted by an agitated stranger. A large red-faced man blocked the path to his car in the deserted parking lot and began screaming about Jeff's homework policy for students. Jeff admitted that with all the violent school-related acts reported in the news lately, his first reaction was fear.

As he recounted the story, however, it became evident that no serious consequences resulted from the incident. He handled the encounter well. He calmed the man down, defused the situation, and arranged a later meeting where he could control the setting and circumstances.

Jeff's story sparked our curiosity. We asked him what techniques he used to defuse this potentially dangerous scenario. After a few thoughtful seconds, he admitted that he really was not sure. He said that he had simply reacted by doing what seemed appropriate.

Jeff is not the exception to the rule. Successful educators should have excellent verbal and interpersonal skills. Many do. Like Jeff, however, few teachers are actually aware of the strategies they use during stressful conversations.

If educators could identify, share, and apply the strategies that have proven successful when dealing with hostile adults in schools, they would have additional tools to be effective leaders. Rather than just reacting to potentially dangerous confrontations, they could become proactive.

This consideration, along with Jeff's experience, became the catalyst for a 3-year study. During this time, we surveyed and interviewed in depth over 250 actively practicing teachers and certified school support professionals. Participants came from urban, suburban, and rural schools of various socioeconomic status. They were representative of both genders and a variety of ethnicities. All were considered highly successful and professional by their peers. By grouping their responses, the most stressful verbal confrontations that school personnel face when dealing with adults in our schools were identified. The responses also identify 15 proven strategies that help us effectively communicate and defuse those situations. Finally, information regarding the participants' perceptions of the degree of stress they would experience in these given situations was gathered.

This book is based on the information gained from this study. The first nine chapters address the most stressful encounters. The vignettes told in each chapter are true stories shared by study participants. The names, places, and times were changed to maintain confidentiality. After reading the opening vignette, you, the reader, are encouraged to ask several self-reflective questions. Would I have managed this situation similarly or differently? How would I have acted? Why would I behave this way? How well did the teacher manage the encounter? What skills can I learn and apply from this example?

Since each of the first nine chapters is based on real encounters, the reader should understand that the involved teachers are human. Some behave admirably whereas others make costly mistakes and errors in judgment. In either case, much may be learned. As you read the other sections of these chapters, we hope you will have your analysis affirmed, or that you might learn new solutions that you have never before utilized, or that the chapter analysis might serve as a trigger for you to create yet a better strategy.

The vignettes serve as a starting point, then each vignette is rated for the level of stress such encounters engender. Although varying encounters elicit different stress levels in individuals, the rating given each story is an average for the study participants. Each chapter analyzes the motives and actions of the hostile adult and the effectiveness of the teacher in managing the situation. The psychological and educational viewpoints are presented. In these two sections, we worked independently of each other, not comparing notes. This technique was used to ensure original thinking and to give a true representation from each of our areas of expertise. The reader is encouraged to compare and contrast each opinion, and thereby gain greater insight into the problem. Finally, strategies and suggestions for application to additional circumstances, along with a brief summary, are highlighted.

The first nine "story" chapters are ordered in a manner to aid in comprehension and application. Each chapter contains 10 sections, each section with a specific purpose to help you in your learning journey:

1. The Story—a true story shared by a colleague.
2. How Taxing Are Such Encounters?—the average "stress" score for 250 study participants.
3. A Psychological Perspective of This Situation—an analysis of the actions and behaviors of the hostile individual.
4. A Practitioner's View—an analysis of the performance of the involved teacher from an educational framework.
5. A Clinical View—an analysis of the performance of the involved teacher from a psychological framework.
6. Additional Suggestions—a collection of additional recommended strategies that would be useful in situations of this nature. These strategies are not all-inclusive but are those most often suggested by the study group.
7. In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?—a sample of situations where the discussed strategies would be most helpful.
8. Summary—a capsulization of the recommended strategies or best practices.

9. Suggested Readings—a list of reading material that is germane to the topic discussed.
10. References—a bibliography presented in the American Psychological Association style.

It should also be noted that each "vignette" chapter offers only an immediate solution to a stressful encounter. It is not designed to provide long-term or permanent resolution. That is the province of conflict resolution, which usually requires the time and energy of the teacher and the school's support system. Readers are strongly encouraged to seek the help of colleagues; administrators; and specialists such as the school psychologist, social worker, and special education team after an initial confrontation has been defused. These individuals will assist the teacher in obtaining a more satisfactory and permanent conclusion to a difficult situation.

Chapter 10 is unique and separate from the previous nine chapters. It identifies and explains the 15 most effective strategies, or best practices, used in hostile conversations. These strategies provide us with a collection of skills useful in our profession. The book concludes with the Kosmoski-Pollack Educators' Code of Ethics, which provides the practitioner with a foundation from which to operate successfully. Finally, this book was reviewed by a number of successful practitioners or educational experts.

Skill in communicating is essential in our profession. The wisdom of our colleagues can help us deal successfully with conversations with hostile adults. If we apply these identified strategies during hostile conversations, we will be more effective educational leaders in today's schools.

Acknowledgments

The contributions of the following reviewers are gratefully acknowledged.

Marcus Ahmed, Professor of Education
Governors State University
University Park, IL

Dolores Appl, Assistant Professor
Department of Special Education and Clinical Service, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA

Ann Bowers, Secondary Teacher
Joliet High School
Joliet, IL

John Bruno, Assistant Professor
Department of Special Education, Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL

Sondra Estep, Director South Cook County
Illinois Education Service Center
Chicago Heights, IL

Katharine Furney, Research Assistant Professor
Center on Disability and Community Inclusion, University Affiliated Program of Vermont
Burlington, VT

Mary Gerritsen, Elementary Teacher
Gary Public Schools
Gary, IN

Terry McHugh, Secondary Teacher
Homewood-Flossmoor High School
Flossmoor, IL

Lori McKinney, Professor of Social Psychology
Governors State University
University Park, IL

Dannee Newton, Elementary Teacher
Orchard Park Elementary
Hammond, IN

Randall Ryder, Professor
Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI

Lonn Wolf, Professor of Counseling
Governors State University
University Park, IL

Other practitioner readers:

Amy Carollo, *High School Special Education Teacher*
Amy Haring, *Elementary Teacher*
Kirk Haring, *High School Dean*
Donna Jackson, *Elementary Teacher*
Sheila Jercich, *School Psychologist*
Jean Pollack, *Social Worker*
Tallulah Jones, *Junior High Special Education Teacher*
Peg Whitaker, *Elementary Teacher*
Shenethe Williams, *Middle School Teacher*

A heartfelt thanks to the nine teachers who shared the joy and pain of their true stories that became the opening vignettes in our story chapters.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of our colleagues, be they aspiring or retired, classroom or special, novice or veteran teachers. These unique individuals understand and are proud of the contribution they freely give to our youth and our country. They work tirelessly, but not for monetary gain or honors. They do so knowing full well that their dedication and efforts will most likely go unnoticed and unappreciated. They realize that any error or imperfection will affect their students and most likely be highly criticized by their communities. Yet they persist.

How extraordinary they are was best expressed by Carl Glickman (1990, p. 37) when he eloquently equated school supervision to glue. To paraphrase Glickman and use the analogy of glue to represent all educators:

> Glue is not glamorous; neither is the teacher. When glue is doing its work properly—for example, by keeping a chair together—it goes largely unnoticed; so does the teacher when a school is functioning well. Glue does get attention when the legs of a chair collapse, just as a teacher does when a school fragments or fails. With success, both glue and the teacher are taken for granted; with failure, they both are held responsible. This is as it should be: Students are in the forefront of successful learning; the teacher is in the background, providing support, knowledge, and skills that enable students to succeed. When student and school success do not materialize, teachers should shoulder the responsibility for not permitting students to be successful.

This book is dedicated to you—our "glue." We hope that it will be an additional tool in your arsenal as you effectively and quietly hold together those things that students need to succeed.

Reference

Glickman, C. (1990). *Supervision of instruction: A developmental approach* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

About the Authors

Georgia J. Kosmoski is Professor of Education at Governors State University, located outside of Chicago. She has been an educator for all of her adult working life. After serving as a classroom teacher, she became an assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent. Both a national presenter and prolific writer, she has written six books and numerous articles for refereed journals. Among her current publications are *Supervision* (2nd edition, 2000), an administration text; and the Corwin release, *How to Land the Best Jobs in School Administration* (revised edition, 1999).

Dennis R. Pollack is a clinical psychologist in Spokane, Washington. Before starting his private practice, he was a psychology professor at Illinois State and Gonzaga Universities. A nationally recognized clinical psychologist and vocational expert, he presents nationally in the fields of psychology and education. He is published in referred journals in psychology, education, and communication.

Together, Kosmoski and Pollack have just completed *Managing Difficult, Frustrating, and Hostile Conversations: Strategies for Savvy Administrators* (2000) for Corwin Press, and they now are working on a book to help teachers acquire the best jobs. Their research interests include addressing the needs of beginning administrators and teachers, and the benefits of mentoring.

1

Defusing the Angry Screamer

THE STORY: Rant and Rave

THE PLACE: An Impoverished City Junior High School

John Randal Cooke was a veteran junior high school social studies teacher. He was no stranger to agitated, volatile, and hostile adolescents. Silent pouting, crying, and irrational screaming were behaviors he encountered on a regular basis. J. R. was an inveterate pacifist, a constant calming influence.

J. R. finished straightening his desktop. He looked at his lesson plans and saw that he had all the needed materials ready and handy for tomorrow. Yes, Thursday looked to be an average day. Then he glanced at his watch. It was already 4:15 p.m. Where did the day go?

As he stuffed a stack of ungraded quizzes into his briefcase, he heard footsteps approaching from behind. When J. R. turned, what greeted him was the sight of a short, burly, middle-aged man whose shirt was drenched with sweat. The stranger marched right around to the opposite side of the desk and glared down at J. R. His face was livid with anger and his jugular vein coursed with blood.

J. R. rose to his feet, but before he could utter a word the visitor verbally lashed out at him. "Just who the hell do you think you are? I want some answers and I want them now."

In direct contrast to the man's booming, shrill, and breathless voice, J. R. articulated slowly and kept his voice low and calm. He began, "I'm John Randal Cooke, one of the social studies teachers. May I ask who you are, sir?"

Ignoring J. R.'s remarks, the man thrust his hand into his pants pocket and produced a crumpled yellow half sheet of paper. J. R. recognized the paper as a Discipline Action Report form sent home to parents. The man peered at the paper and then at J. R. "Yeah, you're the idiot I'm looking for. Just what the f—— is this?" With that, he threw the slip at J. R.'s face. Before J. R. could grab it, the paper fluttered to the floor beside his desk.

Cautiously, J. R. bent down and retrieved the paper. He laid the paper on his desk and smoothed out the wrinkles. He read the comments, and he used the opportunity to calm himself. While J. R. was perusing the slip, the outraged parent continued to rant and rave. The man sputtered something about "getting him" for being a troublemaker. This angry man just did not seem to need to stop to breathe.

Noting the student's last name on the action sheet, J. R. took a chance and cut in. He said, "Are you Mr. Williams?" The man did not respond to the use of the surname, so J. R. concluded that he had correctly guessed the man's name and continued, "It sounds as if you have some concerns regarding this Saturday's in-school detention signed by me and Vice Principal Adams for your daughter Carrie."

"You're damn right! What the hell do you think you're doing here? You're not going to get away with this. We have other plans for Saturday, and if I have to, I'll get a lawyer to stop this Saturday prison," screamed Mr. Williams.

J. R. studied the man more closely. His fists were clenched, his upper torso rigid, and his voice very loud and shaky. Mr. Williams seemed to be struggling to keep verbal and physical control of himself. J. R. concluded that what he was witnessing was an adult temper tantrum. J. R. vowed he would not let Mr. Williams's tirade and manner intimidate or upset him. While Mr. Williams sputtered, J. R. made eye contact, nodded, and regularly interjected short active listening phrases such as, "I hear you are upset with me," "What did I do to upset you?," and "I see you are very angry and upset."

After about a minute, J. R. attempted to direct the conversation to the points he needed to make. He proceeded, "Mr. Williams, I can see that this matter is very important to you. I'm glad you are concerned about Carrie. I care about her too. We do need to talk about the situation and resolve this issue. But right now we are both pretty upset, and it's hard to think clearly. We really have a lot to discuss. The reasons for her detention are serious. I understand that we have to clear this up before Saturday. I really want to take some time and come to a fair understanding. No rushing." Mr. Williams nodded his head and let out an affirmative grunt.

J. R. hurried on before he could be sidetracked. "Vice Principal Adams needs to join us. Unfortunately, she is out of the building today. Could you possibly come in tomorrow or Friday afternoon so all three of us can sit down together and do what's best for Carrie?"

For the first time, Mr. Williams was silent. He appeared to think before speaking. When he began, his voice was more controlled and level. He gruffly responded, "Well, I guess I might be able to get here about the same time tomorrow. You know, some of us do work."

J. R. put on a big grin and replied, "That's great! I'll request a meeting with Mrs. Adams for 4 o'clock tomorrow. Is there a phone number where the office can call and confirm our appointment?"

Mr. Williams rattled off a number, which J. R. wrote down and repeated. Then J. R. asked, "Do you know your way out of the building?" Mr. Williams nodded and moved toward the classroom door. J. R. shook his hand and told him good-bye. Mr. Williams gently closed the door behind himself. After taking several deep breaths, J. R. sank into his chair and dialed the extension for Vice Principal Adams.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

All 250 teachers surveyed reported that they had been confronted by a person who ranted and raved. None were immune to this type of verbal attack. The great majority of teachers who felt they handled the situation successfully used a calm and rational approach. Most teachers who felt they had an unsuccessful experience admit that they were drawn into a yelling contest. They acknowledged they screamed as much as the other involved party. When asked how stressful this type of situation is to them, the teachers responded this was a 5. They felt it was most stressful and taxing.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Yell to Get Their Way?

Why would an adult choose to act in the manner of Mr. Williams? He may have a right to be angry with J. R. based on the information he was given. But he does not attempt to open a dialogue with J. R. Rather, he uses his anger as a means of intimidation. He immediately puts J. R., the man who can help resolve the situation, on the defensive.

The very angry individual who is acting inappropriately may give up emotional control for many reasons. Often the person does not feel that his or her opinion or feelings are recognized, adequately considered, given weight, or accepted. This individual uses anger to overcome a sense of inequality. In this case, by allowing himself to get out of control, Mr. Williams engages in socially unacceptable behavior. He burst into the classroom, obviously without getting proper authorization, yelled at J. R., used very inappropriate language in a school setting, and threw the note into J. R.'s face. All this was done in an attempt to control the situation and humiliate the teacher. It should be noted that the amount of socially inappropriate behavior is a good measure of the individual's anger. It is also a good measure of the actual threat to personal and school safety.

J. R. very quickly attempted to engage Mr. Williams with a friendly greeting. He was not only rebuffed, but Mr. Williams escalated the meeting to a confrontation when he threw the form into J. R.'s face. This was an attempt to elicit anger and humiliate J. R. so that the confrontation could be taken further. It was a challenge to a duel. But instead of responding to the dueling challenge, J. R. acted like a gentleman and picked up the paper. By acting as the gentleman, he began disarming his visitor. It is true that by picking up the paper he put himself in a vulnerable position. Yet it is this act that caught Mr. Williams by surprise.

When J. R. retrieved the piece of paper from the floor and studied it, he indicated to Mr. Williams that he was going to act in a socially appropriate manner and thus put Mr. Williams on notice that the piece of

paper was important to both of them. J. R. allowed Mr. Williams to continue to rant and rave because he was not going to respond to an attempt at personal contact until Mr. Williams had said what was on his mind. J. R. let Mr. Williams know that as a parent he was going to be treated with respect, no matter how inappropriate his behavior. J. R. understood that Mr. Williams had an issue and the right to express it. That the forum was wrong was not important because Mr. Williams was not going to listen to issues of social convention.

Mr. Williams dearly wanted to express his anger and contempt to someone. J. R. recognized that he was going to be that someone. It was not a pleasant task, but one that he was prepared to handle.

After the initial onslaught, J. R. decided to take control. By speaking softly and using such phrases as "I hear you" and "I see you are very angry and upset," he acknowledged Mr. Williams's anger. Why? For two reasons. One, he let Mr. Williams know that he understood and recognized that Mr. Williams was upset. Second, and more important, he identified the level of Mr. Williams's anger. People such as Mr. Williams frequently do not recognize the intensity of their own emotions and need other people to identify them. Once they recognize an emotion in themselves, they may decide that is not the way they want or intend to be.

When J. R. said that he recognized how important the detention was to Mr. Williams, he co-opted his issue. He made it his issue as well. This was very disarming. Mr. Williams lost his reason to be angry. By negating the anger and co-opting the issue, J. R. was able to begin negotiations to reconcile the difference between Mr. Williams and himself.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the Ranting Parent?

John Randal Cooke's behavior during this incident is commendable. Throughout the entire event, J. R. remained calm, maintained his wits, and successfully defused the situation. J. R. did an excellent job of regulating his voice. He controlled his volume, pitch, and speed. A low, slow, and calm delivery is nonthreatening. It has a soothing effect on the listener.

J. R. was very careful in choosing his words. His remarks demonstrated concern and professionalism. He neither threatened nor

showed signs of intimidation. Regardless of Mr. Williams's ravings, J. R. established the most needed elements for closure. He was able to identify with Mr. Williams and address his grievance. J. R. shifted the emphasis during the exchange from "I'll get you, the authority figure," to "We'll work together to help our daughter/student." J. R.'s creative use of the phrases " . . . we are both pretty upset. . . . " and " . . . [we] can sit down together and do what's best for Carrie" was superb. These comments accomplished two things. J. R. made Mr. Williams an ally with the common purpose of helping a child. Also, he arranged for a problem-solving meeting at a time when Mr. Williams would most probably be calmed down. J. R.'s words and delivery gave him more control of the situation.

J. R. was able to depersonalize the situation. By recognizing that he was witnessing an adult temper tantrum, he was better able to control his own feelings and behaviors. This gave him an enormous advantage during the confrontation.

Finally, by accident or design, J. R. did the prudent thing by keeping the desk between Mr. Williams and himself during the tirade. Although it is the rare occurrence when shouters resort to physical violence, it is a genuine possibility. Personal safety and potential escape routes during any screaming encounter must be a priority.

A Clinical View

J. R. handled this situation with the equanimity and aplomb to which we all aspire. He remains calm and professional under stress and possibly dangerous circumstances. Rather than respond with a defensive posture, he bends down and picks up the paper that was literally thrown into his face. When he is being yelled at, J. R. allows the person to have his say. We can entertain the possibility that J. R. might have been tempted to respond with anger himself. But to do so might have put him in real danger. It sometimes does not take much to incite someone you do not know to violence.

To illustrate, suppose you are driving down the freeway in the fast lane and someone is suddenly "riding your tail." As you move into the slow lane to allow the person to pass, in your rearview mirror you notice the very angry driver yelling and making offensive gestures at you. Would you stop to see what the problem is or would you do some-

thing to protect you personal safety? Obviously, you would protect your personal safety because your adversary has shown a willingness to act in a dangerous, erratic, and threatening manner. The other driver is engaging in "road rage" and is not likely to be civil. Your best course of action is to seek help and safety. One solution is to exit the freeway and drive to the police station.

In J. R.'s case, his solution was to act in a calm professional, manner and help the person regain his composure. If Mr. Williams did not calm down, then J. R. should have sought safety and support.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

1. John Randal Cooke did a good job of remaining calm throughout this entire incident. Sometimes this is not easily accomplished. How does one calm oneself? Several proven practices will help you attain this goal. Take a deep breath before initially speaking. This gives you a few seconds to gather yourself and provides at least a small measure of personal control. Then, throughout the encounter, focus on your breathing. Are you taking short shallow breaths or barely taking any breaths at all? If so, force yourself to breath slowly and deeply. This provides a mechanism for both physical and emotional control that in turn results in an increased level of calmness. Another method to help you remain calm is to create emotional distance for yourself (Felder, 1994). It is very useful to repeat silently such statements as "His anger has really nothing to do with me," "I'm watching an adult temper tantrum," "This is not personal." Jeffery Kottler (1997) refers to emotional distancing as detachment. He explains that this practice allows you to step back and disengage from the personal aspects of a conflict so you can effectively respond without being distracted by feelings or anger. Detachment allows one to avoid "getting sucked into the vortex of his (the yeller's) anger" (p. 26).

2. Prepare appropriate and effective retorts before you encounter the next screamer. Individuals deal more effectively with familiar situations. Successful practitioners stated that they developed a personal collection of comebacks that they rehearsed and then used successfully. These teachers drew from their memory bank when a

situation called for an effective line. They have practiced and mentally role-played and therefore feel more familiar with a given situation. This preparation eliminates the need to develop a creative response during the heat of battle. In essence, this practice is a form of self-training. Training in all areas of communication is necessary for school personnel (Rubin, 1998). A few useful rejoinders might include: *"Hold on! I want to be able to hear you correctly, so you'll have to slow down a little."* Or perhaps, *"I won't interrupt you. Just take your time and tell me the whole thing. I will speak only when you're finished."* A third possibility might be, *"Go ahead. I'm listening. Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me all about it."* You will notice that these examples, like the ones you will soon develop, are positive statements rather than criticisms. They attempt to be nonthreatening and nondefensive. Each places you in the position of being a facilitator who respects the other individual. Finally, they all maintain a high degree of professionalism (Felder, 1994).

3. Although this vignette does not highlight the need to be a good active listener, active listening is a most useful skill when dealing with a person who is ranting and raving. Remember to use facial and body language, posture, and gestures that convey your genuine interest and concern. Small things such as eye contact, nodding, and leaning forward will have a large impact on the final outcome. Successful businesspeople have long held that good listening is an essential tool. Educators should seriously consider adopting the business "Listening Ladder."

The six steps to becoming a better listener form a LADDER:

L: Look at the person speaking to you.

A: Ask questions.

D: Don't interrupt.

D: Don't change the subject.

E: Empathize.

R: Respond verbally and nonverbally. (Bly, 1999, p. 3)

4. Good timing is central to positive communication with the yeller. Sometimes the person is in such a rage that it is impossible for him or her to calm down enough to have a productive exchange of ideas. In this scenario, the wise teacher knows discussion is best delayed until the person has the anger under control—when he or she has cooled off. The "wait time," however, should not last so long as to become fuel for additional anger. Usually, postponing a meeting for 24 hours is a good rule of thumb.

5. Finally, taking safety precautions when you are verbally attacked by a yeller is essential. Prevention is always preferable to treatment (Phillips, 1997). If at all possible, make sure you have an available avenue of retreat. Use self-reflection or brainstorming to determine possible safety actions before a confrontation occurs. Insist that your school develop and stringently enforce protocol and safety procedures for all visitors. Mr. Williams should never have had access to an unprepared and isolated teacher. Understand that this does happen all the time because many angry people refuse to follow the rules. Reduce this type of behavior with appropriate safety measures.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

Unfortunately, people who rant and rave come in all shapes, sizes, and ages. Both men and women are capable of yelling fits. Screamers live in all neighborhoods, belong to all cultures and ethnicities, and come from every socioeconomic group (Niehoff, 1999; Sylwester, 1999). Bosses and dependent children are equally capable of throwing a tantrum. They can lose self-control and revert to negative behaviors. Therefore practicing teachers will inevitably find themselves confronted from time to time by angry screamers. There is no documented evidence that demonstrates that certain teachers are less susceptible than others (Lewis & Carifio, 1997).

The suggestions provided regarding Mr. Williams are effective and valid with any individual. Calmness, active listening, practice, and good timing are the keys to handle these individuals successfully (Berman, 1998; Gordon, 1998; McEwan, 1998).

Summary

- Understand that screamers belong to every group of people and that you will inevitably confront them during your tenure as an educator.
- When faced with a person who is ranting and raving, control both your voice and your choice of words, so as to be neither threatening nor intimidating nor intimidated.
- Depersonalize the tirade in your own mind. The yelling is not about you.
- Determine the particulars of the events that triggered the behavior. Who is complaining and why? What are the related circumstances and concerns? What outcome is the individual seeking?
- Be cautious when dealing with an angry screamer. Such individuals can lose physical control. Understand that age, sex, and physical appearance are not in themselves indicators of individuals who can be a genuine threat to your safety (Garbarino, 1999). Take safety precautions for yourself and bystanders.
- Learn and practice techniques that will aid you in remaining calm and in personal control. Some worth developing are breathing properly, distancing, and predetermining a collection of appropriate comebacks.
- Sharpen your active listening skills. Use facial expressions and body language, posture, and gestures that convey genuine interest and concern. These are great assets during these encounters.
- Remember, some confrontations are better postponed until the yeller has better control of herself or himself. Wait until the person cools off to resolve the situation.
- When appropriate, seek the help of an administrator, counselor, social worker, or school psychologist to provide expertise and professionalism.

Suggested Reading

McEwan, E. K. (1998). *How to deal with parents who are angry, afraid, or just plain crazy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

References

Berman, S. (1998). The bridge to civility: Empathy, ethics, and service. *The School Administrator, 4*, 52-58.

Bly, B. (Ed.). (1999). *Bits & pieces for salespeople: Wit and wisdom to inspire your sales success.* Fairfield, NJ: The Economics Press.

Felder, L. (1994, October 15). How to deal with difficult people at work. *Bottom Line/Personal*, p. 13. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

Garbarino, J. (1999). Young murderers. *American Educator, 23*(2), 4-9.

Gordon, R. (1998). Balancing real-world problems with real-world results. *Phi Delta Kappan, 79*(4), 390-394.

Kottler, J. A. (1997). *Success with challenging students.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Lewis, M. L., & Carifio, J. (1997). Ratings of assault vignettes. *Journal of Research in Education, 7*(1), 40-47.

McEwan, E. K. (1998). *How to deal with parents who are angry, afraid, or just plain crazy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Niehoff, D. (1999). *The biology of violence: How understanding the brain, behavior, and environment can break the vicious cycle of aggression.* New York: Free Press.

Phillips, P. (1997). The conflict wall. *Educational Leadership, 54*(8), 43-44.

Rubin, J. (1998). Training knows no bounds. *NEA Today, 15*(3), 334-336.

Sylwester, R. (1999). In search of the roots of adolescent aggression. *Educational Leadership, 57*(1), 65-69.

2

Dealing With Public Humiliation

THE STORY: Beet Red and Feeling Like the School Dunce

THE PLACE: The Large Conference Room at the Hamilton Inn on Route 46 Outside of Littletown, Indiana

It was Tuesday, November 13, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Daniel Ortega was feeling very pleased and flattered that his principal had invited him to the countywide education conference. Yesterday, Principal Clayton Madson informed him that several of the leading area educators wanted to get to know him better. Dr. Madson thought this fall meeting held out on the highway was a nice informal way to start. He explained that the word was out that Dan was doing a good job as the chair of the newly established regional faculty advisory committee to the area superintendents. Dan felt empowered and proud.

Dan knew that this was a very important opportunity and a delicate situation. He felt excited and perhaps a little wary. This conference

could do much to enhance his position in the education community or to keep him as a subordinate outsider.

Entering the large conference room after his breakout session, Dan spotted his principal camped at a round table near the middle of the room. Dr. Madson was sitting with three other people, leaving two empty spots. Taking his cue, Dan took a deep breath, waved, and plastered on his famous easy grin as he made his way to the chair next to his principal.

As Dan shook hands all the way around, he was not surprised by the makeup of this group. He had heard the names of these people mentioned around school and read about them in the local paper. Besides Dr. Madson, there was Walt Jenson, local teacher union president and active member in the state teachers' organization. Next to Jenson sat Marilyn Orenberg. Dan already knew her. Orenberg was the district's assistant superintendent of curriculum and the former principal of his high school. Dan had heard rumors that she had a good chance of becoming the district's first female superintendent when the present superintendent retired in 2 years. The other woman seated at the table was introduced as Chantil Moore, a state award-winning teacher from Harding Elementary. Just as Dr. Madson completed the introductions, Everett McDonald, the principal at Harding, slid into the one remaining chair. He shook Dan's hand and praised him for his work on the advisory committee. Dan smiled broadly and made a mental note to remember these powerful people.

As they waited for the last session of the day to commence, the conversation around the table was both lively and convivial. These seemed to be very genuine and cordial people. Twice there had been spontaneous laughter, and on one occasion Everett McDonald laughed so hard that he almost choked.

After the banter had lasted a few minutes, Walt Jenson turned to Dan and asked, "What was all the fuss last Friday about the Summerses' youngest boy? What's his name? Louis?" Before Dan could get out one word, Principal Madson broke in.

He put his hand on Dan's shoulder and said, "Man, oh, man! Nothing gets by you, Walt. It was just lucky that I happened along or this young man would have been in some serious sheep dip.

"Well, to come to the point, Dan was investigating charges of alleged cheating in his third-period class. He was grilling Louis Summers, Emily Summers's last child, in the Science Department's faculty

office. No hard proof, mind you. The kid did look pretty guilty, but he never admitted a thing. Dan was *soooo* dumb. He kept pressing the kid. Like that would work in Littletown."

All the people around the table looked startled and turned to peer at Dan. Some shifted and a few even snickered. Dan flushed. He felt the heat rising up his neck to his cheeks. But Dr. Madson was merciless. He threw up both hands in exasperation and continued, "Believe it or not, Dan didn't know anything about the Summerses' lawsuit, and all the trouble we had with their daughter back in '95. This fool was planning on calling in the parents and threatening to recommend suspension of the kid. If I hadn't taken over, the district could have been slapped with another lawsuit. We'd all be ruined. And this kid would be packing his bags and heading for the big city."

All the people at the table burst into laughter. Dan knew he was as red as a beet. He stammered how sorry he was and something about having a lot yet to learn. Dan felt totally embarrassed. His supervisor had just publicly humiliated him and now was laughing at his expense with his cronies.

Dan wanted to run. He was shaking inside. He felt helpless and betrayed. He sat silently until the wrap-up session began. To Dan, the ensuing minutes seemed like an eternity, and the cheerful farewells felt insincere and hollow. Dan felt like the "Indiana School Dunce"!

Later, as Dan drove home, he felt his fury rise. He hated what his principal had done to him. More important, Dan knew that he himself should have handled the situation better. He was not happy with himself. He vowed to formulate a plan of action before something like this ever happened to him again. Dan Ortega, school dunce, would not be meekly led to the woodshed another time.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Encountering public embarrassment, ridicule, or humiliation happens to everyone sooner or later. As one becomes more empowered and visible, the possibility of such occurrences increases. Teachers must expect that they will be confronted with such situations. The question therefore is not what to do if one is publicly embarrassed, but rather how to deal professionally with the incident when it does occur. Of the 250 teachers who shared their stories, 154 admitted that they had expe-

rienced an incident of public ridicule, humiliation, or embarrassment related to their job. The interviewed educators found this type of encounter most stressful and taxing. They ranked it a 5.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Publicly Embarrass or Humiliate Others?

This is a situation where there was one obvious perpetrator and several acquiescent participants. Dr. Madson is the principal of a large high school and holds a doctorate degree. He is not an uneducated fool. Definitely, he had some specific purpose in mind. One possible explanation of his behavior is that he was demonstrating to Dan and the others his absolute control. In the scenario, the other listeners expressed no chagrin, nor did they attempt to alleviate Dan's suffering. Either they were Dr. Madson's fellow travelers or they themselves had been humiliated in one of Dr. Madson's carefully directed dramas. The most generous hypothesis is that they had been overwhelmed by Dr. Madson and therefore were afraid to challenge his actions. They avoided confrontation that might make them the target of his cruelty in the future.

People like Dr. Madson want to demonstrate their power and use it to humiliate others. They frequently derive a sense of pleasure when they abuse and manipulate others. For them, the greater the control, the greater the pleasure derived. Dr. Madson exercised his power over Dan and used the others as his audience and witnesses. He achieved the desired laughter at Dan's expense. In Dr. Madson's eyes, Dan will never be a threat to his authority. Dr. Madson marked his territory.

Some people use humiliation because they are insensitive to its effects. They see only the humor in the embarrassment of the victim. From where does this behavior come? Frequently, the source lies in one's family constellation in childhood.

Consider your own family. Who is the butt of jokes by other family members? Usually, it is the oldest sibling who is the perpetrator of

jokes at the expense of younger family members. Yet it is the oldest who reacts to humiliation the most strongly. Difficult as it is to believe, it is not uncommon for a child with learning disabilities to bear the brunt of family jokes. How easy is it for the youngest to correct the oldest sibling in your family? How easy is it for the learning-disabled child to correct the academically successful child? In both circumstances, the weak are at the mercy of the strong.

As adults, we tend to transfer accepted family behaviors to our social and professional life. If we are fortunate to grow up in a loving and supportive environment, our insensitive behaviors are corrected and we learn from our mistakes. If we are left unchecked, however, there is no reason for us to change our behaviors.

Most likely, Dr. Madson was never corrected and never learned sensitivity to others. He demonstrates no knowledge or skill in the newly defined area of interpersonal intelligence. Research demonstrates that had Dr. Madson developed the necessary ability to feel and convey genuine sensitivity, his entire organization would be strengthened. People who work together in situations where positive interdependence and empathy exist exhibit higher achievement levels, self-esteem, esteem for others, motivation, task enjoyment, creativity, and thought processes (Gardner, 1994, 1995; Goleman, 1995; Lazear, 1991). In this case, Dr. Madson has yet to learn sensitivity and Dan is at his mercy. At this time, can Dan successfully change Dr. Madson's attitudes and behavior? Certainly not!

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did This Teacher Handle Public Embarrassment?

Dan Ortega handled this situation better than one would think at first glance. Admittedly, he did not use a number of responses that probably would have successfully defused, or at least lightened, the situation. Dan did refrain from a host of responses that would have made the scenario even worse, however. He avoided three mistakes that are worth exploring.

First, Dan behaved professionally when he did not retaliate from anger. He could have lashed out at his principal for what he viewed as a personal betrayal. He did not. Verbally lashing out at his supervisor in this setting would have gained him nothing, but rather caused addi-

tional grief for himself and the others (Lee, 1993). Yelling or chastising the assembled educators for their heartless or insensitive attitudes would have served no useful purpose. Dan was wise to avoid making potential enemies.

Second, Dan might have stalked out of the conference room. He did not. If Dan had run, he would have left himself with few choices—to apologize, grovel, or resign from any districtwide activities. By holding his ground, he at least kept his options open. He did not put himself in an untenable position.

Finally, Dan maintained a professional demeanor when he faced the onslaught, without making unnecessary and excessive excuses. Dan could have whined or made insincere apologies (Carlson, 1997). In today's vernacular, he might have "wimped out." Dan Ortega can be thankful that he did not.

A Clinical View

This is an exceedingly complex situation. First, look at the effect on Dan. We know that he has been taken to the proverbial woodshed. Whatever sense of control he had felt he had was taken away from him. His "sense of who he was" in the educational community was shattered. His "sense of where he stood" with his peers and superordinates was undermined. His ability to rely on his own judgment was mightily shaken. And perhaps worst of all, he was totally unprepared for it.

Dan was excited and honored by the prospect of being accepted by the leaders of the community. He went to the meeting with high expectations. Rather than getting the reward he thought was forthcoming, he was punished. And he was punished by a person whom he looked up to and admired. We know this will have an effect on Dan's behavior because behavior that is rewarded increases and behavior not rewarded decreases. (Skinner, 1953). Moreover, Dan is now unsure of how to act.

To illustrate this problem, consider this story. Today I want to train my Irish wolfhound puppy to fetch the newspaper. On past occasions, the dog was trained to respond to reward. The reward was a biscuit, a pat, or both. Now I take the dog outside, pick up the newspaper, and put it the dog's mouth. The dog holds the paper. I say, "Fetch." I have the dog drop the newspaper in my hand and say, "Good dog." Finally,

I reward the dog with a pat and a biscuit. After many repetitions, the dog is trained to fetch the newspaper.

One day I wake up in an angry and hostile mood. I say, "Fetch," and the dog brings to me the newspaper. I respond with a sharp kick. Will my relationship with my dog ever be the same? No! Will the dog ever be the same. No!

Will Dan ever be the same? No! In his own way, Dan expected a reward. He expected approval, acceptance, and comradery. Instead of the reward of approval, acceptance, and comradery, Dan was punished by humiliation. Worse than having a newcomer's standing at the bottom of the social totem pole, he felt he had no standing whatsoever.

Humiliation is a difficult emotion to overcome, and public humiliation is worst of all. To use the example of the dog again, how would you expect the dog to act the next time that I say, "Fetch"? If you said the dog would display shaking, trembling, an inability to respond, and possible urination, you are correct. Dan's responses were as dramatic as those experienced by the puppy. Dan was numb, basically incapacitated, and when he apologized, he participated in his own humiliation. It was as if his will were taken away. Usually, after such an experience, most people feel intense physical and emotional exhaustion. It will take time for Dan to recoup emotionally and physically.

After this encounter, there are several proactive steps that Dan could have tried. First, Dan needs to evaluate the incident in a rational manner. He needs to evaluate Dr. Madson's intent. Dan should discuss the incident with a trusted colleague or an out-of-district mentor in order to gain a better understanding of the group dynamics and to better release his own frustration. Second, he needs to learn more about local school politics. Third, when Dan comes in contact with "the witnesses," he could refer to the incident as his first "celebrity roast." This is one subtle way to change their negative attitudes to acceptance. Finally, he needs to talk privately with Dr. Madson regarding his behavior at the conference. His silence would indicate to Dr. Madson that he would accept such treatment. Dan needs to voice his objections and clarify his own feelings and reactions to his principal.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

Although a number of positive actions were demonstrated in this case, several additional suggestions to successfully survive an uncomfortable and potentially damaging situation are:

1. Do not overreact. In many situations, our view of what is embarrassing or humiliating might be skewed or inflated. Dan might have suffered much less if he viewed the situation as less serious or damaging. There is some question as to the gravity of this incident. One way to check on your personal "read," or perspective, of a given situation is to ask yourself the following questions: If I were a bystander and heard this transpire, would I feel sorry for the butt of the story? Did this damage the individual discussed? If your answer is no to either of the above, relax and do not take the situation so seriously. But if your answer is yes, proceed coolly, thoughtfully, and professionally.

2. Heed the advice of Robert Carlson (1997): "Surrender to the fact that life isn't fair" (p. 47). If you understand and accept Carlson's statement, it becomes much easier to proceed. Instead of expending needless energy bemoaning an injustice done to you, you can focus on your direction and behavior. Rodney LaBrecque (1998) urges us to think "Teflon." If you are covered in Teflon, the criticism will not stick but rather roll off and be discarded.

3. Take the time you need to calm yourself. Waiting to respond until you are reasonably calm most often increases your ability to respond intelligently and thoughtfully (Bailey, 1990). One useful calming technique is Jacobson's (1937) relaxation device: Breathe in for a three count; hold for three; breathe out for three; hold for three. Repeat until calm.

4. Determine the degree of truth or validity of the embarrassing or humiliating statements. Are the comments true, somewhat true, or completely erroneous? What was the degree of truth told? Your determination will likely dictate your response. If Dr. Madson's remarks about Dan were technically correct, Dan could have said the following to lighten the situation: "He's absolutely right. It could have been a very difficult problem. I'm sure glad Clayton and I worked together to protect the district and still were able to deal successfully with the student. It's great to have a principal I can count on." If, however, Dr. Madson's remarks were somewhat twisted or only partially true, Dan might have responded, "Now, Dr. Madson, you know I was the one to call you. Aren't you glad I asked for help before going off uninformed? Heck, you're the one who always insists that your teachers seek administrative help when things get sticky." If the principal's recreation was completely false, Dan might have replied, "Gee, Dr.

Madson, that's not the way I remember it at all." Finally, there are times when, regardless of veracity, it is impossible to respond because of the need for confidentiality. In that situation, it is often possible to express your inability to respond. You might remark, " I'm afraid I can't agree, but for several reasons this is an inappropriate time and place to discuss this."

5. Consider the use of humor. Humor is a very powerful tool in tense situations such as embarrassment, ridicule, or humiliation. An old adage, true today as it was for our grandparents, is, "It is a big person who can laugh at himself." Is it not better to have people laugh *with* you than *at* you?

6. Clear the air regarding potential litigation. At a later and more appropriate time, Dan should voice his concern to Dr. Madson regarding the legal ramifications of discussing a student, by name, in public. Although it seems ludicrous that a practicing principal would not understand that such behavior creates a grave and potentially litigious situation for himself and Dan, his behavior speaks otherwise. As a matter of self-preservation, Dan needs to voice his concern about and disapproval of such events in the future.

7. Finally, Dan needs to privately express his anger and disgust. Silence will only send a message to Dr. Madson that he can get away with this kind of outrageous behavior any time he chooses. When Dan does confront Dr. Madson, he must do so in a calm, professional manner. He must leave his own temper at home.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

Public embarrassment, ridicule, or humiliation may come from a variety of sources. Any constituent is capable of such behavior. This form of verbal confrontation may be hurled at you from a superordinate, peer, constituent, or subordinate. As a professional, you will be able to adapt the suggestions provided above to meet most situations. The key to success in every incident is to remain level-headed, professional, and detached. Avoid retaliation and defensiveness (Charlesworth & Nathan, 1985; Kierkegaard, 1980; Schwartz, 1995).

Summary

- The more responsibility and visibility people have, the more vulnerable they are to being embarrassed, ridiculed, or humiliated. Active, empowered teachers have a great deal of responsibility and are highly visible. Therefore expect that on occasion you will experience this taxing and often painful phenomenon.
- Cruel humiliation tactics often develop in childhood. Prepare in advance to confront individuals who use these tactics. Understand that your success will be limited.
- Remember to keep things in perspective. Do not blow things out of proportion. Things might not actually be as damaging or serious as you first believe.
- Remain cool and positive. Learn to use relaxation techniques.
- Let the degree of truth told be a guide to your response.
- Learn to insert humor in your attitude and statements. Humor is a powerful tool.

Suggested Readings

Attitudes and Techniques That Help When You Are Embarrassed or Humiliated

Carlson, R. (1997). *Don't sweat the small stuff . . . and it's all small stuff.* New York: Hyperion.

Lee, J., with Stott, B. (1993). *Facing the fire: Experiencing and expressing anger appropriately.* New York: Bantam.

Schwartz, T. (1995). *What really matters?* New York: Bantam.

Learning About Multiple and Emotional Intelligences

Gardner, H. (1994). *The arts and human development.* New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (1995). *Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership.* New York: Basic Books.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* New York: Bantam.

Lazear, D. (1991). *Seven ways of knowing: Teaching for multiple intelligences* (2nd ed.). Palatine, IL: IRI/Skylight Training and Publishing.

References

Bailey, J. (1990). *The serenity principle.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Carlson, R. (1997). *Don't sweat the small stuff . . . and it's all small stuff.* New York: Hyperion.

Charlesworth, E. A., & Nathan, R. G. (1985). *Stress management: A comprehensive guide to wellness.* New York: Ballantine.

Gardner, H. (1994). *The arts and human development.* New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (1995). *Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership.* New York: Basic Books.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* New York: Bantam.

Jacobson, E. (1937). *Progressive relaxation* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kierkegaard, S. (1980). *The concept of anxiety.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

LaBrecque, R. (1998). *Effective department and team leaders.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Lazear, D. (1991). *Seven ways of knowing: Teaching for multiple intelligences* (2nd ed.). Palatine, IL: IRI/Skylight Training and Publishing.

Lee, J., with Stott, B. (1993). *Facing the fire: Experiencing and expressing anger appropriately.* New York: Bantam.

Schwartz, T. (1995). *What really matters?* New York: Bantam.

Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science in human behavior.* New York: Macmillan.

3

Handling Parents With Blinders

THE STORY: My Baby Told Me

THE PLACE: An Elementary School in a Large California City

Ted Caring checked the wall clock for the third time. All his students had left for the day and he was waiting for Mrs. Brown. She was nearly 20 minutes late and Ted was growing impatient. If he had not wanted to talk to her so badly, he would have given up and gone home. But Ted believed that this long-overdue parent conference was necessary and had great hopes for its outcome. He decided to give her another 10 minutes. While he waited, he thought about what he already knew and what he hoped to accomplish at this meeting.

Mrs. Alma Brown was Ryan's grandmother. Ryan had come to live with her when he was 5. Although his birth mother visited occasionally, Mrs. Brown had total custody of the boy. She was the only permanent adult and family in Ryan's life. Ted was curious about her. He could not find anyone at the school who had ever met the woman. She

never came to the regularly scheduled conferences, open house evenings, or social events. All the family history he knew came from the kindergarten admissions file and a few flip comments from Ryan himself. Ted wondered how an elderly lady coped with such a tough fifth-grade boy. He wondered if she would be cooperative and supportive of his efforts.

Indeed, Ryan was an enigma. What made this boy tick? It was already November, and Ted still felt he had not reached this child. Ryan caused real trouble. He was big for his age and often picked on smaller children. Because they were afraid of him, most students avoided him. They literally ran from him at recess. Ryan was not part of any group. He seemed to have no friends and certainly no best friend. This year alone he had been sent to the office four times by other teachers. On one of those occasions, suspension had been seriously considered. And in the last week, Ted had to punish him for fighting, destroying Melody's math paper, and "smarting off" to him. Ted understood that Ryan was a very angry child with a nontraditional home life. He hated labels. A less sensitive teacher might have labeled Ryan as "A Bully with a Big Chip on His Shoulder."

Academically, Ryan was an average student who got mostly Cs on his assignments and tests. Unfortunately, Ryan deserved and received an F in conduct on his first report card this year. He never volunteered or raised his hand during discussion. Yet when Ted called on him anyway, he usually knew the answer or had an interesting, albeit smart, comment. Ted did not want to give up on this child. He believed this boy could be turned around. He only needed the right key. He hoped the grandmother would have a clue. Surely she would help. So Ted continued to wait.

Just as Ted decided that Mrs. Brown was a no-show, the voice on the intercom announced that she was on her way to his room. The instant Ted saw Mrs. Brown, he knew he had imagined her all wrong. He had envisioned a shy, sedate, senior citizen. This woman was young. She was probably in her late 30s or early 40s. And she was a flashy dresser—a modern flower child with heavy makeup, very short skirt, bare midriff, boots, and a purple streak in her bleached hair. Grandma? Ted was dumbfounded.

While trying to regain his composure, Ted introduced himself and offered Mrs. Brown a chair at his round table. He began by asking, "Mrs. Brown? You are Ryan's grandmother and legal guardian?"

"Yes. But I'd rather not have you spread that around. Most people think I look way too young to be anyone's granny. And it's Ms. Brown. Better yet, why don't you call me Alma? That's what my baby, Ryan, calls me," replied Ms. Brown.

Ted nodded and smiled, but before Ted could respond Ms. Brown continued, "Now, what's this all about? Why did you drag me all the way down here? You have some stupid beef with Ryan or me?"

"Yes and no," Ted began soothingly. "I have no quarrel with you, Ms. Brown. I mean, Alma. But I am very concerned about Ryan's behavior. Ryan has great potential and promise, but his daily behavior is getting in the way of his ability to succeed. I'm hoping that when you understand what is going on here, we can work together to change Ryan's behavior." Ms. Brown just sat and stared at Ted. She did not respond. So Ted leaned forward, plunged in, and told her exactly what had been going on at school. Throughout Ted's remarks, Ms. Brown remained frozen. She showed no facial expressions or emotions. She wrapped both arms around her chest and only her left foot tapped silently on the floor.

Ted ended by saying, " Help me! I don't want him to be thought of as the school bully."

Ms. Brown leaned forward, put both palms on the table, and exploded. "Now, you listen to me, Mr. Teacherman. My baby told me how you don't like him and how you pick on him all the time. Guess he's right. He only fights when someone messes with him first. I taught him that and he knows that he better not let nobody mess with him. Ryan told me you never blame the ones who started it. All you teachers are the same. If you can't do this job, get another one. I think you like lording it over little kids. Get out of my way. We got nothin' more to say." Alma Brown stood, shoved back her chair, and stalked out of the room.

After a few seconds, Ted sighed and shook his head. He realized that he had handled this conference poorly. Ted understood that since he had alienated the custodial grandparent, she would not help him work with Ryan. Ted felt he was on his own.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

All of the teachers with at least 3 years of experience who were surveyed reported that they had been confronted by an irrational, hostile

parent. None were immune to this type of verbal attack. One therefore can assume that given time in the profession every teacher will have to face this type of encounter. Another surprising statistic provided by the survey participants is the number of teachers who fear parent conferences. Eighty-one of those surveyed (almost one third) admitted that they dreaded the scheduled parent-teacher conferences. They contended that at these meetings they were too often berated and vilified by an irrational parent. These teachers voiced their disgust for the entire process. This fact should be most alarming to all educators. We know that the research clearly demonstrates that student academic performance increases with parents' involvement. Students are more successful when teachers are in close and regular contact with their parents (Freiberg, 1998; Gladwell, 1998; Hansen & Childs, 1998).

When surveyed teachers were asked how taxing were confrontations with irrational parents, their average response was a 4—more stressful.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About Bullies and Irrational Parents?

Was Ms. Brown being irrational? From her perspective, was she teaching Ryan survival skills? Was she teaching him what she had learned in her own home? Was she teaching him these things because of her own life experiences in school? Or was she proud of her grandson because he stood up to an authority figure? One can only speculate about her orientation and motives. It does appear, however, that Ms. Brown was sending Ted Caring a message that she was a person who could not be easily approached.

One possible explanation for these behaviors is that Ms. Brown flagrantly demonstrated her rejection of societal norms to Ted by her socially inappropriate dress and her language, unwillingness to cooperate, hostility, and verbal assault. Ryan was mimicking his grandmother's behavior by bullying and rejecting school (social) norms. Second, Ryan was rewarded for his bad behavior by Ms. Brown. She appeared to reward any hostile behavior toward his fellow students and authority figures. We might conclude that any success

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

that Ted could make with Ryan would be readily sabotaged by his grandmother.

Recent events and interest in school safety and climate have lead to a plethora of research on the issue of bullying. Baldry and Farrington (1998) reported that the incidence of bullying is extremely high. Over half of the students that they researched reported being bullied in the previous 3 months. One quarter of the students were both bullies and victims. According to Bosworth, Espelage, and Simon (1999), boys reported more bullying than girls. These authors further noted that gender was not a predictor in bullying in early adolescents. Atlas and Pepler (1998) used videotape and audiotape to record bullying behavior and found that boys and girls bullied at the same rate. Using questionnaire and personality assessment techniques, Salmivalli (1988) found that adolescents who bullied had high social and physical self-concepts. It is interesting that other adolescents did not see them in such a favorable light either socially or physically. Students who assisted the bully had either the same social and physical self-concept as the buly or had poor social and physical self-concepts. As one might have expected, Baldry and Farrington (1998) reported that adolescents who were both bullies and victims tended to have authoritarian parents. Their research lends some support to the "like grandmother, like grandson" hypothesis.

Victims are, as you might imagine, at the bottom of the social strata. Salmivilla (1998) found that adolescents with poor social and physical self-concepts were more likely to be the victims of bulling than any other group. Also, victims tended to be overprotected (Smith & Myron-Wilson, 1998).

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the Irrational Parent?

Ted Caring is a compassionate, caring, and dedicated teacher. For the most part, he did a fine job in a very awkward and punishing situation. He should be praised for his desire and efforts to help his student, Ryan. Throughout this vignette, Ted's attitudes and beliefs are laudable. During the confrontation with Alma Brown, he performs a number of positive actions. First, Ted treated Ms. Brown with a great deal of kindness and consideration. Although he was surprised and appalled by the way the woman looked, Ted still showed her the respect and courtesy due a parent. Throughout this encounter, Ted remained po-

lite and civil—not the easiest task. He sat with her at a round table, spoke to her as an equal, and stressed his desire to work together.

When engaged in the hostile confrontation, Ted used a number of defusing tactics. He never raised his voice to match the grandmother's volume. He never retaliated when Ms. Brown began to verbally attack him. He refrained from personalizing the situation. Also, Ted used body language to try to create a more positive climate. On several occasions, he nodded, smiled, and leaned toward Ms. Brown. Clearly, Ted's strategies were ineffective with her. Yet his efforts are praiseworthy.

One must also praise Ted for his persistence. Somehow he was able to get this "ghost" parent to come to a meeting at school. He continued to wait for the tardy Ms. Brown much longer than many would consider fair. And when he failed to gain her help and cooperation as custodial grandparent, he still planned to do his best with Ryan. Ted certainly deserves an A+ for persistence.

Ted's major negative action is his failure to recruit additional help from other school professionals. Most schools do have access to the services of professionals who are trained to help students and their families. Ryan's daily behavior suggests that he is in need of and would benefit from special school services. His grandmother's resistance and hostility support this contention. Ted should formally request the assistance of the special education team to evaluate the Browns' needs.

A Clinical View

While waiting for help from the special education experts, there is little Ted might do in the immediate situation. Ryan's grandmother appears not only to have accepted Ryan's behavior but promoted it. Ted will have to work within those existing limitations and framework. Ted can not ignore Ryan's bullying behavior. He is like most teachers in that he is very concerned with this issue. Boulton (1997) found that 87% of teachers wanted more training on how to deal with bullies. Boulton also reported that bullying was a major problem for all of us. Bullying is a problem that wears us down. The longer we work as teachers, the less sympathetic we are to the victim of the bully. This is a tragic finding. Is there nothing to be done?

So how should Ted proceed? Actually, there are a number of things that might modify the immediate classroom situation. Unfortunately, with the lack of cooperation from Ms. Brown, it is going to take Ted longer to change Ryan's behavior. The victimization of the other students and teachers is going to continue to occur for a period of time. Still, Ted

must persist. If Ryan's behavior is not changed, there is a high probability that the community at large is going to suffer violence because of it.

Here is one possible course of action open to Ted. Even though Ted knows that his efforts at controlling Ryan are not going to be supported from home, he must immediately set limits on Ryan's behavior with Ryan. Second, he must institute a clear discipline policy in the classroom. He must notify his principal of his concerns about Ryan's behavior and his reason for reaffirming a clear discipline policy. He must have the support of the principal. Third, he needs to inform all parents of the discipline policy in his classroom. All of these are intermediate steps to structuring a more comprehensive plan to manage and change bullying behavior.

One final consideration is the hopeful news that research to eliminate bullying behavior is in progress. New programs to manage and change this undesirable behavior are being developed. Colvin, Tobin, Beard, Hagan, and Sprague (1998) and Clark and Kiselica (1997) examined the issue of bullying in the U.S. public schools. They reported the successes of a number of programs being used and demonstrated that bullying is not only a U.S. problem, nor is America the only place where programs were being developed. Olweus (1997) reported results of a school-based European program in 42 schools over a 2-year period. Successes were astounding. As a consequence of this program, the incidents of bullying decreased 50% to 70%, and the amount of antisocial behavior decreased as well. For us, it is immaterial where a given program originated; what matters is whether it can be used effectively to make the classroom situation safe for our students.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

1. Both Alma Brown and Ryan appear to be individuals who need professional support and guidance. Ted needs to discuss his observations with his principal or immediate supervisor, the special education team, the school social worker, the guidance specialist, or the educational psychologist. These people can help the Browns with their social behaviors and Ryan with his potential learning problems. Often teachers, like Ted, are called on to be an unofficial diagnostician. They are frequently the first, and in some cases the only, person to suspect that a student or his or her family might need special services. Professional teachers get involved. If they suspect that an individual or family has a

problem that can be alleviated by the school's special support staff, good teachers seek out and inform the appropriate professionals. They cooperate and work closely with these specialists to best serve students and their families.

2. There is no indication in this scenario that Ted brought any documentation to this meeting. When dealing with any parent where you need to report undesirable academic or social behaviors, it is a very good practice to provide hard copy documentation—evidence. Generally, parents are more receptive to bad news if documentation supports the case (Bruer, 1998; Kosmoski & Pollack, 2000). Contrarily, if there is no documentation to support the teacher's position, parents will understandably often conclude that it is only an accusation or personal opinion. Without evidence, they will discount or resent the "accusation" and become more hostile. It should be noted that written documentation is also helpful to the special services professionals if need for their services should arise.

3. If so many of our colleagues find parent-teacher conferences a repugnant obligation rather than an opportunity to communicate and elicit mutual support, the process needs to be examined and changed. Some schools are making strides in this direction. Consider an alternative to the traditional structure and setting where the parents meet privately with the teacher in an empty classroom. Several schools located in the Chicago suburbs use this alternative format. For the scheduled parent-teacher conferences, parents arrive and are directed to a reception area. This area is a comfortable space manned by one or more school officials (administrators, counselors, etc.). The officials greet the parents and give them their children's report cards. After several "time to cool down" minutes, the parents are directed to a communal conference area where teachers are waiting at clearly labeled stations. Many schools use their media centers or gymnasiums. The conference stations are positioned far enough apart to ensure reasonable privacy, yet are visible to all. Postconference surveys suggest that parents were satisfied with this procedure and teachers felt more comfortable and safer. Furthermore, the schools reported that hostile confrontations were dramatically reduced (Ward, 1999). It can be theorized that parents who participate in a parent-teacher conference in public view tend to monitor, censor, and control their own behavior better than those who have a conference in a completely private and isolated setting.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

Teachers hold formal and informal conferences with many individuals. They counsel and confer with individual pupils, groups of students, parents, parent groups, colleagues, and superordinates. The techniques highlighted in this vignette and the Additional Suggestions section are the personal and professional qualities of dedication, persistence, and passion; communication skills including verbal strategies and body language; a team approach to servicing the entire family; and alternative forms for conferencing (Kosmoski and Pollack, 2000). Obviously, used singly or in groups, all of these techniques are valuable tools in every conferencing setting.

Summary

- Not all parents behave as we would like when they engage in a conference. Some are irrational, have their own agenda, become defensive, and wear blinders. Regardless of parent behavior, the teacher's mission is to promote and encourage students' growth and learning. The teacher needs to initiate and foster parent-school interaction, trust, and cooperation.
- Teachers can expect that they will encounter difficult parents during their tenure as an educator.
- Teachers need to develop professional qualities, along with verbal and nonverbal communication skills, to successfully grapple with these individuals.
- When appropriate, teachers must involve the school's special services professionals to help their students and their students' families.
- Teachers can be instrumental in designing a parent-teacher conference structure that is most productive.

Suggested Readings

Freiberg, H. J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways. *Educational Leadership*, *56*(1), 22-27.

Hansen, J., & Childs, M. (1998). Creating a school where people like to be. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 14-17.

References

Atlas, R., & Pepler, D. (1998). Observations of bullying in the classroom. *Journal of Educational Research, 92*(2), 86-99.

Baldry, A., & Farrington, D. (1998). Parenting influences on bullying and victimization. *Legal & Criminological Psychology, 3*(2), 237-254.

Bosworth, K., Espelage, D., & Simon, T. (1999). Factors associated with bullying behavior in middle school students. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 19*(3), 341-362.

Boulton, M. (1997). Teachers' views on bullying: Definitions, attitudes and ability to cope. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 67*(2), 223-233.

Bruer, J. T. (1998). Brain science, brain fiction. *Educational Leadership, 56*(3), 14-19.

Clark, E. A., & Kiselica, M. S. (1997). A systematic approach to the problem of bullying. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 31*(4), 310-325.

Colvin, G., Tobin, T., Beard, K., Hagan, S., & Sprague, J. (1998). The school bully: Assessing the problem, developing interventions, and future research directions. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 8*(3), 293-319.

Freiberg, H. J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 22-27.

Gladwell, M. (1998, August). Do parents matter? *The New Yorker,* pp. 55-65.

Hansen, J., & Childs, M. (1998). Creating a school where people like to be. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 14-17.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (2000). *Managing difficult, frustrating, and hostile conversations: Strategies for savvy administrators.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Olweus, D. (1997). Bully/victim problems in school: Facts and intervention. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 12*(4), 495-510.

Salmivalli, C. (1998). Intelligent, attractive, well-behaving, unhappy: The structure of adolscents' self-concept and its relations to their social behavior. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 8*(3), 333-354.

Smith, P. K., & Myron-Wilson, R. (1998). Parenting and school bullying. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 3*(3), 405-417.

Ward, S. (1999). *November minutes of the South Cook County Illinois Principal's Association.* Flossmoore, IL: South Cook County Illinois Principal's Association.

4

Neutralizing a Person Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol

THE STORY: Flying High: A Collision Course With Disaster

THE PLACE: Middle-to-Upper-Class, Multiethnic Suburbia

Mary Blake glanced at the classroom clock as the last of her pupils and their parents trickled out of her room. It was 9:05 p.m. and time to close up shop. She concluded that this was a very successful Open House. Over 70% of her third-grade students and their parents had been in attendance. The children had beamed, and the adults seemed very interested and positive about all they saw and heard. Proud Mary! Their smiles and comments were heartwarming. Mary hoped this event was indicative of parent support for the coming school year. As Mary closed the windows and prepared to leave, the classroom door swung open. Entering the room was a scowling, tall, bony, disheveled woman. Behind her stood one of Mary's students,

Amanda Gardner. Amanda was a true loner. She was a shy, sweet little girl who stayed to herself and rarely spoke up.

Mary immediately grinned at the pair across the room and addressed the adult, "Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda's teacher, Mrs. Blake. Please do come in." As she spoke, Mary walked toward her visitors, closing the distance between them. She extended her arm and offered to shake hands. The woman mumbled that she was Amanda's mother and was sorry she was so late. Her words were somewhat slurred. She automatically accepted Mary's offered right hand as Mary used her left to touch the woman's shoulder.

Mary froze. Now in close proximity to the woman, Mary recognized that this was potentially a very serious and dangerous situation. Mrs. Gardner was sweaty, glassy-eyed, and visibly twitching with a hand tremor. The woman reeked of whiskey. Poor Amanda trembled as she clutched her mother's coat and stared at her own shoes.

The realization that she was alone with a potentially dangerous and out-of-control person hit Mary like a lead fist. Mary Blake was afraid. She knew she had to think and act clearly and swiftly.

As she released Mrs. Gardner's hand, Mary moved toward the intercom button mounted on the wall by the chalkboard. As she gingerly walked away, Mary explained, "I'll just let the office know we'll be staying a few more minutes." As Mary pressed the button, she kept a wary eye on her visitor.

When the school secretary, Mrs. Pelanzo, asked how she could help, Mary answered, "Please tell Mr. Hawkins I'll be a few minutes late. I'm here speaking with Mrs. Gardner and Amanda. We need some more time to visit. Please ask Mr. Hawkins to come straight to my room when he arrives." Mrs. Pelanzo seemed to momentarily hesitate before responding. Then she assured Mary that she would take care of things.

The intercom went dead with a static snap and Mary could only hope that help was on the way. She knew she had twice clearly and slowly enunciated the words "Mr. Hawkins," the school's code signal for danger. Now it was up to others to act on her behalf.

Mary decided that her best course of action was to stall for time and to keep Mrs. Gardner occupied and calm until help arrived. In a low soothing voice, she began by complimenting Amanda on her hard work. Mary attempted to steer Mrs. Gardner toward Amanda's desk which was covered with examples of good work. Mrs. Gardner did not

appear to understand. Rather, she jerked away and seemed agitated. Finally, she blurted out, "It's not my fault." Mary looked her straight in the eye and nodded understanding. Mrs. Gardner continued, "I'm only late because this brat didn't remind me to come. What bad things has she done that she's hiding from me? Just tell me and I'll take good care of Little Miss Smart Aleck. I'll whip her good."

Before Mary could respond, she heard footsteps hurriedly approaching. Both Mrs. Gardner's and her head snapped toward the door. Mary breathed a sigh of relief. There stood her principal and a uniformed off-duty police officer hired to help with crowd control.

Principal Habbeeb smoothly explained that the Open House was over and all parents and students had to leave the classrooms. He instructed Mary to remain and close up the room. Then he and the police officer flanked Mrs. Gardner on either side and escorted the woman and her daughter down the hall toward the office.

Mary sank into her desk chair and held her head in her hands. This incident had really upset her, and she needed some time to compose herself. After about 15 minutes, Mr. Habbeeb returned and explained that everything was under control. He told Mary that the police officer was driving the Gardners home, and it was now safe for her to leave.

Epilogue. When Mary arrived at school the next morning, her principal informed her that they would report the incident to the Director of Student Services and the State Department of Child Services. Mary was instructed to record and report any unusual circumstance and any signs of child abuse. Nothing ever materialized. During the school year, Mrs. Gardner did appear once at a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference. Mr. Habbeeb was also in attendance. No mention was ever made of the Open House fiasco.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Confrontations in schools with adults or students who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol are viewed as among the most stressful encounters experienced by the practicing teachers. This is understandable. Common sense tells us that out-of-control and therefore irrational people pose a real physical threat to all. Fear of this kind of danger is not only normal but desirable. The 250 teachers polled rated this type of encounter as a 5—most stressful.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Are Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol?

People under the influence of drugs or alcohol present many problems for society. In our daily lives, we are often victims of people who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Imagine yourself in these three situations. You go to the emergency room and are treated by a young doctor high on narcotics. He obtained the drugs by writing his own prescription. Would you want to be treated by such a physician? Or imagine that you are involved in a personal injury lawsuit. Your lead attorney and her partner ask for a brief recess. The three of you meet in a conference room. As soon as the door closed, the partner tells your attorney that her arguments are flawed and that she needs to quit snorting cocaine every morning before the start of court. Would you want such an attorney? Finally, imagine yourself working in a restaurant and a former coworker comes into the place brandishing a knife. He demands the night receipts because he needs money for methamphetamine. He apologizes for what he is about to do. Your "friend" slits the cashier's throat and seconds later yours. You and the cashier die. He is sentenced to death for these murders.

All three incidents are true stories. All three cases had terrible consequences for the drug users, as well as their victims (Hartmann, 1995). If we were the victims, we probably would not care that the physician became addicted because of migraine headaches, or that the attorney became addicted after her spouse bought her cocaine for a birthday present, or that the murderer from age 9 was given drugs by his amphetamine-addicted mother. Rather, we would care what these people did to us while under the influence of drugs.

In the case of Mrs. Gardner, we do not care why she drinks. Whatever the cause, she was a potential threat to Amanda and the other students because the alcohol affected her judgment.

Mrs. Gardner burst into the school and obviously acted inappropriately. Mary confirmed with her own nose that Mrs. Gardner had been drinking. This should have given Mary a sense of relief. Sure, the intruder was angry and agitated, but now Mary had valuable informa-

tion at her disposal. Mary understood what she was dealing with. She knew the psychological and physiological effects of alcohol. Mrs. Gardner, like most people under the influence of alcohol, really wished to allay her own fears and anxiety, not to threaten others. Mary knew Mrs. Gardner's behaviors were antithetical to the effects of alcohol. Mrs. Gardner was angry and agitated, whereas alcohol is a depressant. By acting in a slow, calm, and soothing manner, Mary was using what she knew about the effect of alcohol on physiology to help calm her down. Mary was able to help this raging parent change her behaviors and reach her desired state of momentary well-being. Finally, Mary understood that Mrs. Gardner was not likely to remember any of this encounter.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the Parent Who Was Flying High?

Mary's overall behavior in this situation should be commended. Most noteworthy among her actions were the correct recognition and assessment of a potentially dangerous situation, identification and proper ordering of the most crucial actions necessary to defuse the event, speedy response time, and communication skills.

Assessment of the situation. As soon as the facts became clear, Mary recognized the very serious nature of the matter. Using all of her senses, she astutely assessed the situation. Mary saw that the woman was glassy-eyed, heard her slurred speech, felt her tremor, and smelled her breath. She correctly deduced from her sensory evidence that the woman was intoxicated. She immediately understood that an intoxicated, angry, and physically menacing adult can inflict grave injury to students and staff. Simpson (1998) reminds us that we must take threats seriously. Mary knew that Mrs. Gardner needed to be stopped and removed from the premises as quickly and peaceably as possible. She exemplified the behaviors of a true professional as described by Morrison, White, and Van Velsor (1987): "She doesn't fall apart when things get tough. She has great cool under pressure" (p. 24).

Execution of appropriate actions. This teacher successfully executed a remarkable series of correct behaviors. First, she summoned help. By notifying the secretary that she required assistance, she ensured the backup required to terminate this threat. It took courage for Mary to

make the intercom call. Too often and for too many reasons, teachers avoid calling for help. Some misguided teachers want to avoid appearing foolish to their bosses if the call turns out to be unnecessary. Law enforcement experts constantly assure us that it is better to call in 10 false alarms than to fail to make the one call that is necessary. Other teachers harbor the false notion that calling for help will give them a "black eye." They fear that requesting help will damage their image as a competent disciplinarian—a professional who can deal successfully with hostile adults and students. This is an untenable position. Some situations require teamwork and the assistance of others. Experts in community relations have identified school safety and climate issues as among the most important with parents and community members. They recognize the need to act in unison (Kohn, 1996; Rose & Gallup, 1998; Schmidt, 1997). Finally, some teachers naïvely believe they can handle anything on their own. They feel that they and their schools are invulnerable. Recent historical events of school violence clearly refute this foolish belief.

Mary also demonstrated remarkable presence of mind by occupying Mrs. Gardner's attention until help arrived. She remained outwardly calm and nonthreatening. These are techniques recommended by conflict resolution experts (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989; Toby, 1993-1994; Wilson, 1995). Finally, by accident or design, Mary contained the confrontation to one classroom where she had some control. She literally removed a potential threat from any unsuspecting adults or children still present in the school building. Only after Mrs. Gardner was outnumbered was she escorted through the building.

Response time. Mary's speedy action speaks for itself. Throughout this incident, Mary acted both decisively and swiftly. Both qualities are essential in potentially dangerous situations. All educators could use Mary's reaction time as a model when faced with such predicaments. Some examples of excellent use of time included swiftly assessing the situation, summoning help, and engaging the woman in soothing conversation.

Communication skills. Throughout this event, Mary demonstrated excellent communication skills. Her verbal ability and body language were assets for her. One praiseworthy skill was her ability to speak calmly and positively. She kept her volume low and tone conversational, never yelling or demanding. She conveyed self-control and professionalism. Mary's tone and volume must have conveyed understanding, acceptance, and trustworthiness to Mrs. Gardner.

Mary's body language during this situation helped to achieve a positive resolution. One example was Mary's use of proxemics. She created more or less space between herself and Mrs. Gardner to better control the climate. Another example was making nonthreatening physical contact by shaking hands and touching the woman's shoulder before any actual dialogue. Remember the subtle cues she used when engaged with Mrs. Gardner: She smiled, looked directly into the mother's eyes, and nodded. These are all techniques advocated for active listening (Panico, 1999).

A Clinical View

Mary managed the entire situation quite well. Rather than confront Mrs. Gardner, Mary started with a positive statement, "Hello and welcome." This straightforward greeting engages the angry person without being threatening. It allows the transgressor to see the teacher as a means to achieving her own purposes rather than as a guard or gatekeeper.

Would Mrs. Gardner respond to another person in the same way? Would a male parent have reacted in the same way to Mary? Maybe or maybe not. Although it is impossible to predict, a nonthreatening, helpful posture is usually a good starting point with all people.

What about Mary's touching Mrs. Gardner? It usually is not threatening for a female to be touched by another female. Rather, it is often viewed as soothing and supportive. So, in this case, it was probably appropriate behavior on Mary's part. Be aware, however, that being touched by a person of the opposite sex or another ethnicity is frequently perceived as threatening. Therefore touching should generally be avoided during trying situations. One suggestion: A man who finds himself confronted by a hostile man might try using the "hands in pockets" technique. By placing his hands in his pants pockets, a man sends a subtle but clear message to the other person that he has no intention of engaging in any fisticuffs. A woman who is wearing clothing without pockets would be wise to keep her hands low and still during confrontations, thereby conveying the same message.

Did the principal need to be called? Yes! Mary needed someone to help physically manage Mrs. Gardner had the situation become violent. It was very fortunate that a police officer was at the school as a safety backup and that both could come to Mary's aid. Schools without permanent security personnel must designate several individuals

who can be summoned to help physically manage adults or students who are potential threats to the school community.

Would Mary's behaviors be appropriate in both an urban or rural environment? Yes. Regardless of geographic location, the priorities remain the same. Protection of the school community and oneself must be the primary duty of all school personnel. Defusing the situation becomes the second goal.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

Although Mary Blake did an excellent job, reflection and brainstorming with successful and experienced educators provide a number of additional suggestions to improve the odds for a positive resolution.

1. Lincoln School was very lucky that its principal and a uniformed off-duty police officer were in the perfect position to take action. Emergencies do not always occur at convenient times. Before you and your school are faced with this or a similar situation, it would be wise to determine a plan or procedure to quickly locate and summon help. More than one individual should be designated to respond. Who should be contacted if there is an intruder? In what order should responsible individuals be located and mobilized? When should authorities be summoned? All these issues should be addressed by your faculty. Answers specific to you and your school should be clarified and widely disseminated. Armistead (1996) and Moriarity, Maeyama, and Fitzgerald (1993) urge all schools to develop and implement a crisis communication plan before violence occurs. Exhort your principal and district officials to make this policy a priority.

2. With the advent of "no tolerance" policies, include a section in your student and parent handbooks that addresses the issue of being under the influence of drugs and alcohol (D&A). Your district and school should have written guidelines that clearly define procedures and practices to be followed if an individual is under, or suspected to be under, the influence of drugs or alcohol. Clear and widely distributed written policies protect your school and district from perpetrators who wish to retaliate, as well as from confrontational individuals and groups (Shanker, 1995).

3. One danger not satisfactorily addressed in this scenario is the lack of a plan to remove students and their parents from harm's way.

What if Mrs. Gardner arrived a half hour earlier? What if she had become enraged? Before any incident occurs, schools must develop a system for covertly informing staff of a potential danger. This system or procedure must indicate the presence of an intruder and potential danger, even on short notice. It could be as simple as sounding two short bell rings. Whatever the warning, teachers should have a predetermined plan for directing students and guests to safe locations until the situation is resolved and the order is withdrawn.

4. What about Amanda Gardner? Yes, the epilogue suggests that some precautions and actions were taken to investigate and safeguard against physical child abuse. But what about emotional abuse? What about the emotional health of the child? As Amanda's third-grade homeroom teacher, Mary Blake is both legally and morally responsible. She is Amanda's chief school caregiver and advocate. Amanda's daily school behavior and the events at Open House suggest that she has real emotional problems. Mary needs to act. First, Mary must perform damage control. The day after the Open House, Amanda must feel embarrassment and shame. Mary must comfort and reassure her. She must convey to Amanda that she is valued and secure at school. These efforts might require some time. Next, Mary must formally request that Amanda receive special school services. School psychologists and sociologists are in place to serve children like Amanda. Finally, Mary has an obligation to Amanda to monitor events to ensure that the proper authorities follow through on their duties.

5. Understand that adults and students under the influence of drugs or alcohol may be victims themselves. Their reaction might be the result of an accidental or improper dosage of prescribed medication. Although we could empathize with these unfortunate individuals, our first priority remains: We still must protect our school community from any potential danger.

6. Finally, this incident reminds us that the school campus is no longer a safe haven. It is no longer sacred. Rather, the climate in American schools is becoming more violent (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Kosmoski, 1999). Sadly, cases of student and adult violence in schools are reported on the national news. Since such an encounter could happen in any school, teachers and their administrators should study their existing security arrangements and, where necessary, strengthen them. The use of buzzer systems at entrances, security guards, and metal detectors must be seriously considered. These precautions

might not have stopped Mrs. Gardner, but again, they might be just the deterrents that make for a positive outcome.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

The problem of drugs or alcohol is not confined to a school's unwanted visitors. We must understand that either by deliberate indulgence or by accident, all members of the school community—parents, staff, superordinates, and even small children—are vulnerable. Any time an individual's judgment is altered or impaired, he or she becomes a genuine danger to self and others. Knowing the telltale signs of this condition and the possible bizarre behaviors that might result are necessities for school administrators and teachers. Finally, understanding appropriate countermeasures and having the resolve to act will go a long way to ensure a safe school environment (U.S. Department of Education, 1986).

Summary

If you confront an individual on your school campus who appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you should

- Understand that this is one of the most potentially hostile, dangerous, and stressful situations you will face. Take the encounter seriously.
- Strive to isolate the impaired, out-of-control individual from others. You need to remove the individual from the building and protect the school population until the danger is past.
- When the situation warrants, summon help. Rely on your superordinates, colleagues, and support professionals. Administrators, trained staff members, and police officers should be called to help with the removal of the individual. The safety of the students and staff is a prime responsibility of the good teacher. Removal is a team effort.
- Insist that your school formulates an action plan. Act coolly, decisively, and swiftly. Remember, prior reflection and established procedures can greatly reduce the danger.

- Use all the communication skills at your command. Both verbal and nonverbal skills are crucial. Engage in calm, professional, and caring behaviors. A quiet voice, a pleasant face, slow motions, and sometimes a gentle touch are most often useful. A nonthreatening appearance is an asset. Bob Bly (1999) reminds us that "of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important" (p. 18).
- After the crisis has passed, consider supportive follow-up. Students and staff who have been involved in or even heard about a hostile confrontation might be distraught. Consider the needs of your pupils. Supportive and caring follow-up is appropriate behavior.

Suggested Readings

How to Prepare for Dangerous People Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol

Curwin, R. L., & Mendler, A. N. (1997). *School violence prevention.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lichtenstein, R. (1995). *How to prepare for and respond to a crisis.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

U.S. Department of Education. (1986). *What works: Schools without drugs.* Washington, DC: Author. (For free copies of this handbook call toll free 1-800-624-0100)

Learning About People and Substance Abuse

Landry, M. J. (1994). *Understanding drug abuse: The process of addiction, treatment, and recovery.* Washington, DC: Psychiatric Press.

Lewis, J. A., Dana, R. Q., & Blevins, G. A. (1994). *Substance abuse counseling: An individual approach* (2nd ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ludwig, A. M. (1988). *Understanding the alcoholic's mind.* New York: Oxford University Press.

References

Armistead, L. (1996, April). What to do before the violence happens: Designing the crisis communication plan. *NASSP Bulletin, 77*(552), 31-37.

Bly, B. (Ed.). (1999). *Bits & pieces for salespeople: Wit and wisdom to inspire your sales success, E* (7). Fairfield, NJ: The Economics Press.

Hartmann, D. (1995). *Neuropsychological toxicology: Identification and assessment of human neurotoxic syndromes.* New York: Plenum.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1995). *Reducing school violence through conflict resolution.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kohn, A. (1996). *Beyond discipline: From compliance to community.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kosmoski, G. J. (1999). Defusing a conversation that turns hostile. *The School Administrator, 56*(3), 35.

Moriarity, A., Maeyama, R. G., & Fitzgerald, P. J. (1993). A clear plan for school crisis management. *NASSP Bulletin, 77*(552), 17-22.

Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Van Velsor, E. (1987, August). Executive women: Substance plus style. *Psychology Today,* pp. 18-26.

Panico, A. P. (1999). *Discipline & the classroom community: Recapturing control of our schools.* Mequon, WI: Stylex.

Render, G. F., Padilla, J. M., & Krank, H. M. (1989). Assertive discipline: A critical review and analysis. *Teachers College Record, 90*(3), 607-630.

Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (1998). The 30th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*(1), 41-58.

Schmidt, L. (1997). *Schools and society.* University Park, IL: Governors State University Press.

Shanker, A., (1995, Spring). Classrooms held hostage: The disruption of the many by the few. *American Educator, 19*(1), 10-13, 47.

Simpson, M. D. (1998) Taking threats seriously. *NEA Today, 17,* 27.

Toby, J. (1993-1994, Winter). Everyday school violence: How disorder fuels it. *American Educator,* pp. 4-9, 44-48.

U.S. Department of Education. (1986). *What works: Schools without drugs.* Washington, DC: Author.

Wilson, I. (1995, January 13). Prepare to take effective control. *New York Times Educational Supplement,* p. A6.

5

Refusing to Be Coerced

THE STORY: Pressured by the Unethical Boss

THE PLACE: Washington Elementary School in a Suburb of a Large New England City

At the sound of the daily closing chimes, Jessica Chang swiftly dismissed her fourth-grade students, scooped up her professional portfolio, and hurried to the main office. As a third-year nontenured teacher, Jessica planned to be prepared and on time for her first formal evaluation by Washington Elementary's new principal, Susan Anne Viper. Although she had received excellent evaluations from Ms. Viper's predecessor, Jessica was somewhat apprehensive and determined to make a favorable impression. When Jessica opened the main office door, there stood Ms. Viper. As usual, she was carrying an armload of papers and a huge appointment book. Ms. Viper nodded and checked her watch. Then she waved to Jessica to follow, wheeled around, and led the way to her private office.

After dropping most of her belongings on a side chair, the principal threw a large manila folder onto the round table in the corner of the room and took a seat. Somewhat harried, Ms. Viper began immediately, "Well, hello, Jessica. You're right on time. How's my busy fourth grade teacher today? Can you believe that it's already November 16?"

Still standing, Jessica opened her mouth, but before she could respond, Ms. Viper continued, "Well, I hope you're ready for our first real evaluation meeting concerning your performance? I don't have a lot of time so we need to get right at this. I have two important stops to make after this and need to keep on schedule."

Carrying her own folder, Jessica smiled and joined her boss at the table. Of course, she was prepared for this meeting. Ms. Viper's secretary had called and arranged the appointment about 2 weeks before. After speaking with a fellow teacher who had been through this process with Ms. Viper, Jessica had a good idea of what to expect. Her colleague had told Jessica that Ms. Viper would present a narrative report of her view of Jessica's performance. She would refer to the goals and objectives that Jessica had developed and she had approved for this school year. The principal would expect a progress report from Jessica that covered every objective and the specific activities used to accomplish each. Jessica heard that this meeting could go on for over an hour and that Ms. Viper would be brutally frank and candid. Jessica's peers insisted that Ms.Viper had no concept of praise and encouragement.

And so it began. Both women worked diligently and professionally. They covered a myriad of topics and areas of performance. To Jessica's delight, after only 45 minutes the meeting seemed to be wrapping up. Principal Viper was thorough, questioned a few actions, and mentioned some incidents where she approved of Jessica's actions. Positives far outweighed negatives. Although Ms. Viper was not very warm, complimentary, or effusive, Jessica felt her comments were, by and large, fair and accurate. Jessica believed this was a great meeting—much better than she had hoped. It was a miracle! She had not been raked over the coals, and the principal actually encouraged her to keep up the good work. Next, each signed three copies of the formal written evaluation, and Ms. Viper gave Jessica her copy.

Then, as the two women were sorting the pile of documentation so they could leave, Ms. Viper turned to Jessica and said, "You know, it's very nice to have a competent teacher I can count on in this building. I know you've been here only 3 years and already a number of your fellow teachers are singing your praises. I even hear that a few regularly call you for advice and help." Jessica murmured her thanks and wondered how the principal knew that her peers were seeking her out for direction or calling her to blow off steam.

Ms. Viper leaned closer to Jessica and used a quiet conspiratorial tone. "Not all our staff is as effective as you. I worry about them. I'm afraid they will get into real trouble before I hear about it and am able to help them. Because I'm the boss, some are afraid to be open or come to me with their problems. To do a good job, I need early, firsthand information about all my people. Jessica, I'd like you to be my eyes and ears. Keep me informed. Tell me what they're up to."

Jessica was dumbfounded and appalled. She felt a tight band around her chest. Her mind raced. Ms. Viper, her principal and leader, was asking her to spy on her colleagues and friends. She was using Jessica's position, tenure, and retention to coerce her. Ms. Viper was bribing her with the promise of comradery.

What should she do? If she agreed, her principal would be satisfied and grateful. She would surely get excellent evaluations in the future and a recommendation for tenure. Ms. Viper would treat her as a co-conspirator and "friend." Yet what escalation would Ms. Viper want next? This was something Jessica felt was unethical and something she could not do without feeling very guilty. She would consider herself a traitor and spy.

On the other hand, if she refused she would certainly alienate her superior. In the short time Jessica had known her, she had learned that Ms. Viper did not take no for an answer. Anyone who refused paid dearly. Still, Jessica had made a commitment to herself to stay true to her beliefs and standards of behavior. Being a stool pigeon for the boss was not a level to which she would sink. Jessica decided to do what she felt was right and hope the consequences would be less than she feared.

"Ms. Viper," Jessica replied. "I really can't agree to that. For all of my professional life, I have honored confidences. Anything you tell me or share with me stays between us. The same holds true for my fellow teachers. I would never repeat what was said in confidence. You really wouldn't want me to betray you or my peers. Would you?"

Ms. Viper's face hardened and she responded in a tight voice, "Well, you misunderstood me. I was not asking you to spy on anyone. I just suggested that for the good of the school you share any potential problems with me. But forget I ever mentioned it. It really isn't important." With that, Principal Viper stood and opened her door for Jessica to depart. Jessica knew she had done the right thing, yet she seriously wondered if she had damaged her own career.

Epilogue. For more than 2 weeks, Principal Viper avoided Jessica. At a schoolwide function, the principal refused to acknowledge Jessica. Jessica felt the sting from Principal Viper's bite. Then miraculously, the deep freeze ended. One morning before the start of school, Ms. Viper appeared at Jessica's door and spoke to her as if nothing had happened. She behaved like her old self. Neither woman ever broached the spying incident again. Things returned to normal. Jessica worked successfully for Ms. Viper for another 3 years. She earned tenure and was once publicly praised at a school board meeting. When Jessica was finally eligible for a system transfer to another district elementary school, Ms. Viper did not oppose the move. Rather, she gave Jessica a glowing letter of recommendation.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Your colleagues view such an unethical request as a 4 on the scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most stressful. It is interesting to note that the average rating for beginning teachers with less than 5 years experience was a 5. One can only speculate as to the meaning of this finding. Perhaps the most positive interpretation is that novice teachers have less experience in this matter. They are less secure in their attitudes and position. As their personal esteem and position strengthen and solidify, stress in these situations decreases. Veterans gave this type of conversation a 4 rating. This suggests that they might have successfully handled similar encounters and feel more secure in their positions and belief systems. Most veteran teachers are tenured and probably feel more secure when dealing with their supervisor. The combined average stress rating for novices and veteran educators is a high 4—more stressful.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Do Not Practice the Same Code of Ethics as Most Professionals?

One wonders how Susan Anne Viper, apparently a successful administrator, could make such a glaring gaffe. Obviously, Principal Viper

had her own agenda. She was not thinking of the consequences of her behavior. Rather, she was more interested in how the information would be useful to her and how pliable her nontenured teacher was going to be. If she was successful in her manipulation, she would mold Jessica into a useful tool to do her bidding. We can presume she wanted the information to gain greater personal control of her school and her employees. To Principal Viper, people were pawns on a chessboard and she was the chess master. No pawn was expected to question her motives or turn down her requests.

Consider one interpretation of Susan Anne Viper's behavior. Ms. Viper was very self-centered. She was not concerned with the needs of the school, but rather how the school satisfied her own needs. This was a grandiose position to take, but there are many narcissistic people who take it. Ms. Viper lacked the ability to empathize with others. Ms.Viper, like other narcissistic people, did not care about the reactions of others, because she did not have the same feelings as they did (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Ms. Viper had no difficulty in exploiting others because others existed only to satisfy her. She knew her personal worth was far greater than their worth. She believed they should automatically comply with her requests.

Ms. Viper's needs left her vulnerable to miscalculation. She had no doubt that Jessica was going to do her bidding. When Jessica did not respond positively to her suggestion, she acted in an angry and petulant manner because she did not get her way. She was the spoiled child throwing an internal tantrum. She kept her distance from Jessica for several weeks and then acted as if nothing had happened. Ms. Viper was so self-centered that she could not be bothered by such trifles as a rejection by Jessica. She was more concerned with her next move on the chessboard than with how Jessica responded. Given the opportunity in the future, however, Principal Viper might punish Jessica for her integrity; but more than likely she would not waste time thinking about Jessica's feelings or behavior.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle an Unethical Proposition?

Jessica Chang should be congratulated. This was a very awkward situation and a potentially very damaging conversation. Being asked to

engage in unethical behavior is distasteful and disgusting to us. Genuinely seeking to be leaders and role models, most teachers, like Jessica, would immediately reject such an offer. In today's vernacular, we would tell the person to "kiss off." But as Jessica realized, that natural reaction is not so easy when you are confronted by your superior. Being approached by one's superordinate adds an enormous amount of stress. When job security becomes an additional element in the situation, danger and stress skyrocket.

Jessica not only had to remain true to her beliefs and convictions, she had to directly oppose Ms. Viper. Jessica did not naïvely choose to refuse her principal. She made her choice, knowing full well the ramifications of her action. Jessica understood that strained relations, ostracism, negative evaluations, and firing were all real possibilities. Still she acted. Jessica made an ethical choice and was prepared to live with the possible consequences. She demonstrated great courage and moral fortitude.

The current literature is filled with articles extolling the virtues of character development in our curriculum for students. It eloquently urges us to address this element in the development of pupils' affective domain. Rightfully, the literature puts a great priority on character and moral shaping. C. Anne Lewis (1998) takes this conviction one step further. She insists that students need positive demonstrations of character. Other experts state that students must have examples of positive ethical behavior to successfully internalize these beliefs (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Uchida, Cetron, & McKenzie, 1996). In our vignette, Jessica Chang is a shining example for her students and colleagues. Jessica has character.

Another issue addressed in this sketch is the need to deal with the administrator defined by Kaiser (1993) as the Warrior Administrator. Kaiser explains that the Warrior Administrator must win at all costs. He or she is not bound by normal conventions, ethics, or standards. Warriors play by different rules or by no rules at all. Even true educational leaders, like Jessica, find hostile conversations with this type of individual almost impossible to cope with. In disagreements, Warriors win most of the time. Principal Viper is a Warrior. Jessica understood that her position was tenuous at best. Yet she persisted. Jessica stood firm in her convictions. What she did was difficult and dangerous, but ethical. Hear, hear, Jessica Chang!

A Clinical View

This is one of those situations that we hope will never occur. Jessica was asked to engage in outrageous behavior. She was forced to make a choice between her own set of values and the risk of alienating her boss. If she accepted the administrator's "black bag mission," Jessica was agreeing to become a spy. Will this lead to other secret missions?

Put yourself in Jessica's place. If you engage in this behavior, what will the principal really think of you? If you do not accept the mission, you run the risk of alienating your boss and making your position less secure. There is risk in turning down the principal's request. When she asks you to engage in this behavior, the relationship immediately and permanently changes. You no longer see her in the same light. You have discomforting knowledge about how she runs her school.

A second consideration is the changed relationship that will inevitably occur between the staff. Jessica can no longer speak freely or frankly with her colleagues. She will never know for sure who is already a "Viper spy."

The whole scenario sounds ludicrous, but it is a story that is based on fact. In this situation, Jessica's choice was the best one for herself and others. There will invariably be times when each of us is caught in ridiculous, unbelievable, and ludicrous situations and still must behave professionally and responsibly.

A third point worth discussing is professional standards. Where is our code of ethics? Medicine has one, as do psychology and law. But where is the code of ethics for educators? Some might question whether we deliberately do not have a formal code of ethics because we do not want to be held accountable for our actions. This suggestion is probably unfounded. Yet it is most curious and perplexing why we have never established such a standard.

Yes, there are laws that we must follow. But the purpose of the law may be different from the purpose of a code of ethics. Laws are usually designed to give rights, protect the rights of certain parties, or define requirements. By contrast, a code of ethics sets forth standards of behavior. There may be times when ethical responsibilities conflict with laws. In professions where there is a code of ethics, and the code and laws conflict, the professional has the responsibility to clarify the nature of the conflict, make known his or her commitment to the ethics

code, and to the extent it is feasible seek to resolve the conflict in a way that permits the fullest adherence to the ethics code.

In this scenario, Ms. Viper has not requested that Jessica Chang violate a professional code of ethics, because none exists. Jessica found herself presented with a request that was repugnant to her but was not defined as unethical. There was no professional code of conduct that prevented Principal Viper from making the request or that protected Jessica from the solicitation. Unprotected, Jessica was left to her own moral values. We find that her personal code of conduct was far superior to her principal's code.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

1. Additional suggestions can be made regarding Jessica Chang's behavior. One suggestion to Jessica might be to argue with Ms. Viper that to breach a confidence with her peers could backfire. If her colleagues learn of her betrayal, it would render her effectiveness as a resource and support person useless. It would make fellow teachers more wary of Ms. Viper. Peer knowledge of Jessica's behavior might have a serious negative impact on school climate. It is conceivable that Principal Viper might react positively to these arguments. Still, that too is questionable. And is this argument worth an ethical person's effort?

2. Jessica should work to cement her teaching position with other district leaders. She should seek the support for her quality teaching from influential school personnel, parents, other building and central office administrators, and particularly from Ms. Viper's superordinates—the superintendent and school board. If these constituents strongly supported Jessica, any retaliation attempts by the principal would be ineffective and foolish (Kosmoski, 1999).

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

As educators, we desperately wish to believe that our constituents are honorable and ethical. Generally, this is true. But we too are humans.

In any organization, there are unscrupulous, immoral, and unethical individuals. Occasionally, we encounter people who propose unethical actions and conspiracies. Offers can come from many sources—superordinates, peers, subordinates, community members, and, yes, even from students.

Most of us have experienced incidents where a parent demands or pleads for a grade or rule change. Students have asked us to look the other way or grant leniency. Some of us have been threatened with "bad press" or offered bribes of personal or school-related rewards if we acquiesce to an inappropriate proposal. Unscrupulous administrators have offered teachers plum assignments and duties in exchange for support or silence. It would not be exaggerating to suggest that teachers daily encounter situations where ethics are called into play.

As educational leaders, we must be committed and ready to act. Teachers have great power, and with that power inherently comes great responsibility to act ethically. We must take time to examine and affirm our personal belief system. We must set personal limits for professional behaviors. What do we value and how will we respond to improper offers? Self-reflection will serve us well. If we are clear about our position and how we will respond prior to being approached, we will be able to act more decisively and satisfactorily. Understand that our personal belief systems extend throughout our personal and professional lives. We become our ethics and our ethics become us.

An Additional Consideration Regarding a Code of Ethics

Educators' actions are shaped by their own personal code of ethics. Actions of effective individuals are most often determined by their belief in righteousness. In *The Healing of America* (1997), Marianne Williamson sadly points out that our national conscience barely exists, and standards of behavior are blurred. She contends that responsible individuals, such as educators, must develop their own set of values or code of ethics. Williamson urges us to "rethink" our individual values, ethics, and morals.

Believing their members need a standard for which they are accountable, physicians, psychologists, lawyers, and other professional groups have established these codes. They assert that a code of ethics

sets a standard that members can accept and to which they can aspire (Levinas, 1985; Mackie, 1990; Williams, 1985). After a thorough search of the current literature, however, no existing code of ethics for all educators was found.

As professionals, we too could use a standard by which to measure our actions and behaviors. A code of ethics for educators is essential. Therefore we personally have developed a rudimentary code based on the findings obtained from surveys of 250 educators (Kosmoski & Pollack, 1999). The goal was to establish an initial standard for professionals that can be discussed, refined, and revised over time. The product of our efforts is *The Teacher's Code of Ethics* found in Resource A.

Given this code as a starting point, each of us can develop our own personal code of ethics. After reviewing the standard, we can reflect on how it matches, coincides, or differs from our existing belief system. Aligning the two in a synthesis by which we can live will result in the establishment of our own professional code of ethics.

Summary

- As teachers, we inevitably will receive unethical proposals. Expect and be prepared for them. Know your position and what you plan to do prior to such a hostile conversation. Understand that people will attempt to coerce you.

- Understand that confronting and opposing a Warrior superordinate (one who is unethical and must win at all costs) is both dangerous and often unsuccessful. Support from above and from many constituents offer some protection against unscrupulous Warrior bosses.

- As educational leaders, we have a genuine responsibility to serve as ethical role models for our students, staff, and community. This is not easy, but necessary. As an old proverb reminds us, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

- Self-reflection on this topic is a good way to internally clarify your ethical position. It affords additional strength when you are tested.

Suggested Readings

Ryan, K., & Bohlin, K. E. (1999). *Building character in schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Williamson, M. (1997). *The healing of America.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders.* Washington, DC: Author.

Kaiser, J. K. (1993). *Educational administration* (2nd ed.). Mequon, WI: Stylex.

Kosmoski, G. J. (1999). *How to land the best jobs in school administration* (rev. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (1999, April). *Talking with hostile adults at school.* Paper presented at the American Association of School Administrators National Conference on Education, New Orleans.

Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and infinity.* Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Lewis, C. A. (1998). Seeking connections through character. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*(2), 99-100.

Mackie, J. L. (1990). *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong.* New York: Penguin.

Ryan, K., & Bohlin, K. E. (1999). *Building character in schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Uchida, D., Cetron, M., & McKenzie, F. (1996). What students must know to succeed in the 21st century. *The Futurist, 30*(4), 7.

Williams, B. (1985). *Ethics and the limits of philosophy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williamson, M. (1997). *The healing of America.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

6

Confronting a Colleague Who Steals Your Work

THE STORY: Crookshank Takes Credit

THE PLACE: J. F. Kennedy Middle School in Pleasant View, Louisiana

Dahlia Lee-West marched toward her team preparation office. She had decided to confront Kenneth Crookshank before the other members of their seventh-grade team arrived this morning. She knew Ken would be sitting reading the sports section of their local paper and drinking his morning coffee. Dahlia wanted to meet him alone and reasoned that this was the best way to ensure some privacy with her team leader.

As she moved down the hall, she realized that her neck was stiff and she had a nagging dull pain in each of her temples. No wonder! She had slept little and fitfully. And she hated unpleasant confrontational scenes, which she usually avoided at all cost.

But this was different. She had spent several hours last night in bed tossing and thinking about what Ken Crookshank had done to her. She had decided that she owed it to herself to speak up. Now she was going to do just that before she lost her nerve and resolve.

As she entered the glassed-in office, Ken looked up from his paper and cheerfully greeted her. "Well, aren't you the early bird. What brings you in at this time?"

Dahlia did not find him amusing. She fired back, "You and this e-mail." As she spoke, she thrust the paper she carried at him. Dahlia recognized the strain in her own voice and body.

Ken took the offered hard copy and gave it a casual glance. The dimwit still did not seem to understand. As he returned the paper to Dahlia, he commented, "Sure was nice of the boss to give us a pat on the back. What's the problem with that?"

In an attempt to control her temper and her revulsion, Dahlia gritted her teeth and took a deep breath. In a low, slow voice she read the e-mail text aloud:

Memo
Re: Grant Proposal
Date: January 24th
To: Ken Crookshank
From: Fred Breesey, Principal

Dear Ken,

I've just finished reading your grant proposal. It's great! You've outdone yourself. In a very creative fashion, I believe it meets all the required component standards. Your writing is clear, precise, thorough, and inventive. Best of all, you identified and planned to address the greatest needs of our seventh-grade students. You have done a wonderful job. I'll send the proposal, as it stands (no adjustments necessary), to the State Department of Education. I truly believe that the state should and will fund this proposal.

Ken, again, congratulations and deepest thanks for a job very well done. You are one of our best assets. Also, please express my personal thanks to every member of your seventh-grade team. I know you would not have been as successful without their support and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Fred
cc: The Seventh-Grade Explorers—Team Teachers

When Dahlia finished reading, she looked up and locked eyes with Ken. Wasting no time, she went straight to the crux of the matter. She asked simply, "Explain this to me?"

Without missing a beat, Ken grinned and quipped, "I don't understand. Explain what?"

"Come on, Ken. Get off of it," retorted Dahlia. "Just how come Mr. Breesey seems to think my proposal came from you? Did you remove my name and put yours on it?"

"Hold on. That's not fair," snapped Crookshank. "All I did was put the proposal on the required state form. For your information, there is no place for 'Author's Name' on the form. Instead they ask for the school's name. And by the way, I don't appreciate your accusation that I stole your work."

Although she had not expected this response, Dahlia held her ground. After taking a slow deep breath, she said, "Well, that still doesn't explain why the principal thinks you wrote the proposal. Do you realize that I gave up several evenings and two Saturdays to get it done right? I did this all by myself and I deserve all the credit. I think someone should be telling me that I'm wonderful, rather than thanking you for a job well done."

Ken Crookshank nodded and replied. "None of this occurred to me when I read the e-mail yesterday. I hadn't thought about it that way, but now that you bring it to my attention, I think you have a good point. Mr. Breesey does seem to be confused. As team leader, I'll be sure to see him today. I'll make it clear that you are the primary author. Will that make you feel better?"

Dahlia thought for a few seconds, shrugged, then responded, "Yes, you need to make sure he understands my part in this project. And, Ken, I hope this kind of 'misunderstanding' never happens again, because I'll have to take much stronger action."

With that parting comment, Dahlia turned and left the office. She hoped Ken understood that she would never be used again. A sardonic smile crossed Dahlia's face as she silently mused, "Ken Crookshank won't get away with stealing the credit from me. It was worth the confrontation."

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Of the 250 teachers surveyed, a whopping 214 admit that they have had an experience where a colleague or supervisor stole credit for their work or idea. As a group, they found this experience to be a 4—more stressful. We can only speculate as to why our colleagues rated this kind of encounter a 4. Three possible reasons come to mind. First,

criminologists affirm that victims of robberies feel personally violated in the process. When an individual takes credit for our labors, he or she has virtually robbed us of our work or thought. Second, successful resolution of such incidents usually requires the teacher to initiate a confrontation. Educators find deliberately initiating confrontations distasteful and repugnant. Third, this type of behavior is in direct conflict to one of the basic organizational principles of education. Since the middle of the 20th century, the American educational system has accepted and practiced Fayol's Principles for Organizations (Gulick & Urwick, 1937). We expect esprit de corps. We expect our colleagues to accept authority, act as a team, follow the rules, and demonstrate loyalty to us and the organization. When this does not occur and these basic tenets are rejected, teachers feel distraught. Survey participants emphasized that not being able to trust an individual with whom they had daily contact kept them off balance, agitated, and defensive.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Take Credit for Others' Work or Ideas?

We can only surmise what Ken's intentions are in this situation. Here is one interpretation based on the known facts. Ponder this.

What a fine letter of praise Ken received. If the form did not require an author's name, why did Ken receive such praise? If this was a group effort, why did Ken not make sure that the credit for the work was appropriately disseminated? It was not disseminated because Ken wanted the credit. His need for self-aggrandizement overcame his common sense. Ken weighed the risks and found the trade-off between risks and reward acceptable. When he was confronted by Dahlia, he provided his excuse and expected her to accept it. He threw in a little calculated anger for intimidation. Obviously, Ken evaluated Dahlia's resolve and found her to be only a little threat. When she does speak up, he uses feigned anger and indignation to intimidate her. It works! Finally, he correctly believed that Dahlia would not carry the matter any further but would stop after confronting him.

Taking credit for other people's work has long been a problem in education. In this case, Ken found that taking advantage of a loophole

was a wonderful excuse for taking credit for work he did not produce. He was able to rationalize his behavior and prepare a defense for his actions well in advance of any challenge. His rationalization allowed him to increase the significance of his work and diminish the contribution of Dahlia. All it took for Ken to plagiarize was for him to accept the thought, "There was no place for the author's name." In spite of this, his attempt to deflect responsibility to an object, a form, it is still a case of plagiarism. Plagiarism is defined as "using another's ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information" (Governors State University Writing Center, 1996, p. 1). Or more specifically, it is "to steal or pass off the ideas or words of another as one's own" (Merriam-Webster, 1993, p. 888).

Most teachers do not plagiarize because it would violate their personal values and professional ethics. They know their responsibilities toward members of the team. Others do not plagiarize because they fear being caught. Unfortunately, there are a few educators like Ken with no values or fear. Ken's lack of concern for the other members of the team, absence of guilt, and contrived anger when challenged indicate that he is an individual with character and personality shortcomings. This boils down to the fact that this was a case of arrested development of conscience and overblown self-worth. Although Ken's behavior may not reach a diagnostic level, it certainly suggests a pattern that is likely to occur again. He demonstrated both narcissistic and antisocial traits. Ken, and those educators like him, are not to be trusted.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the Colleague Who Took Credit for Her Work?

During this vignette, Dahlia Lee-West did a number of things well yet made one critical mistake. Her positive behaviors included taking swift action. Her indignation was justifiable and her courage to face Ken Crookshank was admirable. This story clearly illustrates an occasion when it is appropriate to initiate a confrontation to rectify a wrong. Many teachers would have sulked, grumbled, or complained to a friend but then taken no direct action. Confronting someone who has wronged you is difficult and stressful. It is an action that many educators avoid. True educational professionals do not practice avoidance, however. Rather, they act. Confrontation is inevitable. But confrontations do not have to be hostile and threatening. They can be

handled in a professional manner. It is also worth noting that Dahlia initiated the discussion with Ken soon, but not immediately, after the e-mail was received. This gave her enough time to organize her thinking and control her emotions and yet remain timely. Experts suggest that timeliness often strengthens a position, whereas procrastination often weakens one (Martin, 1995; Piper, 1974).

Second, Dahlia's manner during the incident was laudable. Although she struggled a few times with composure, generally she remained calm, professional, and focused. For the most part, she controlled her anger and tried to depersonalize the situation. She did not engage in yelling, rudeness, or personal attacks. She did practice active and thoughtful listening.

Finally, Dahlia did voice her grievance clearly and forcefully. She stated her position with conviction and was adamant about rectification. Professionals can and should use passion to verbalize their position and achieve their goals. One can be forceful, determined, and still polite. Professionalism is not synonymous with meekness.

On the negative side, Dahlia did make one huge blunder. She overestimated Ken Crookshank's personal and professional character. Ken had read the memo himself the day before and had made no effort to "give credit where credit was due." Obviously, he had no intention of doing so unless he was challenged. This was not an accident, nor was it unintentional. Yet, at the conclusion of this vignette, Dahlia seemed satisfied with the outcome. She appeared to believe that Ken would keep his word, confess his wrongdoing, and give her the credit she deserved. It is amazing that she genuinely believed the situation was successfully corrected. Why would she believe that? Why would she trust Ken? His behavior throughout this incident proved he was untrustworthy and unprincipled. Dahlia was very naïve to think he would change and when left alone would independently behave honorably. Had she been less gullible, she would have suspected he was manipulating and maneuvering her for his own gain. She should have insisted that she be present when he clarified the situation with Mr. Breesey, their principal.

A Clinical View

Dahlia Lee-West should not be proud of how she handled this encounter. Certainly, she was not responsible for Ken Crookshank's actions, but she was guilty of allowing herself to be manipulated. Dahlia was

duped. Her lack of understanding permitted Ken to use her, the team, the principal, and the entire school community. Clearly, this was an incidence of Ken taking credit for someone else's work. We can call it theft, lying, plagiarism, and a host of other names. Regardless of the label, this action was despicable.

Look at the sequence of events. Ken deliberately chose to plagiarize Dahlia's grant. He worked out his rationale well in advance. He decided that even if he were challenged, the letter of praise was going into his file. When confronted by Dahlia, he showed no genuine contrition but consciously used pseudo-anger to intimidate her.

How should Dahlia have confronted Ken? Clearly, she should not have settled for the final outcome. Ken offered crumbs when Dahlia deserved the whole pie. Nowhere in this scenario was there a discussion of a public correction. Ken never agreed that the e-mail letter should be retracted and a corrected version be sent to all parties concerned. We know only that perhaps Ken was going to speak to the principal. Big deal! At a minimum, a corrected letter should have gone out to all concerned parties. Second, the new letter should have included a statement that instructed recipients to destroy all previous (erroneous) communications. Finally, Dahlia might have insisted that this issue be raised at a faculty ethics committee meeting. Otherwise, it is probable that Ken will not change his behavior the next time there is an opportunity to take advantage of someone else and steal credit for his or her work.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

1. When another deliberately takes credit for your actions or ideas, you do need to act decisively. First, determine what will satisfy you and fairly right the wrong. Do you want your administrator or team to understand the truth? Do you demand public acclaim or acknowledgment? Or is a simple apology in order? When you genuinely understand what will rectify the situation to your satisfaction, the best plan of action will become evident.

2. Consider correcting the situation yourself rather than trusting and relying on the person who has stolen from you. If a colleague or supervisor has blatantly or repeatedly taken unearned credit, sidestep

that person. Why deal with or protect unethical individuals? They are neither deserving of nor entitled to your loyalty (Williams, 1985; Williamson, 1997). In this vignette, Dahlia could have gone directly to her principal, Mr. Breesey, and tactfully explained the truth. She might have used this approach: "Mr. Breesey, I am confused and need to sort out my thoughts. I read this memo and don't understand. The memo sounds as if you believe that Ken Crookshank wrote my grant proposal. How can that be?"

3. Another very useful tactic for neutralizing an individual who takes credit for your accomplishments is to elicit the aid of colleagues who know the truth. For example, in this vignette Dahlia could have asked one or two knowledgeable team members to accompany her when she visited her principal or directly confronted Ken. Most individuals are more likely to act responsibly when approached or challenged by several people than by a lone individual who speaks in private (Kosmoski & Pollack, 2000; Oliva, 1993).

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

Obviously, "credit thieves" can wear any hat. Student teachers, colleagues, and building and central office administrators are capable of taking credit for your accomplishments or ideas. The techniques suggested in this chapter can be applied to most incidents. Which strategy you choose to implement will be determined by the gravity of the situation, the position of the offender, and your view of a fair resolution. Knowledge of the various approaches and techniques available when curbing a credit taker will allow you to successfully rectify such situations.

Summary

- If you have solid evidence that an individual has deliberately taken credit for your work or ideas, you are justified in confronting and challenging her or his action. Confrontation is sometimes necessary and desirable. This confrontation can be handled in both a forceful and a professional manner.
- Before confronting the "credit thief," do not procrastinate; but do take the necessary time to formulate your plan and control

your emotions. Determine your ultimate goal. What will satisfactorily rectify and resolve the situation?

- If you view the situation as serious, or if it is one of many occurrences, seek out the help of others. Knowledgeable colleagues and trustworthy superordinates are most helpful in these circumstances.
- Remember to remain professional. It should be your goal to regain what is rightfully yours, not to punish others.

Suggested Readings

Martin, J. R. (1995). A philosophy of education for the year 2000. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(5), 355-359.

Williams, B. (1985). *Ethics and the limits of philosophy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

References

Governors State University Writing Center. (1996). *Plagiarism: What is it and how to avoid it.* University Park, IL: Governors State University Press.

Gulick, L., & Urwick, L. (1937). *Papers on the science of administration.* New York: Institute of Public Administration, Columbia University.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (2000). *Managing difficult, frustrating, and hostile conversations: Strategies for savvy administrators.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Martin, J. R. (1995). A philosophy of education for the year 2000. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(5), 355- 359.

Merriam-Webster. (1993). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (10th ed.). Springfield, MA: Author.

Oliva, P. F. (1993). *Supervision for today's schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Piper, D. L. (1974). Decisionmaking: Decisions made by individuals vs. those made by group consensus or group participation. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 10*(2), 82-95.

Williams, B. (1985). *Ethics and the limits of philosophy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williamson, M. (1997). *The healing of America.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

7

Surviving a False Sexual Accusation

THE STORY: Accused of Sexually Assaulting Students

THE PLACE: Chief Joseph School in Hangman, Washington

The day began pleasantly. The morning was quite brisk and Jolene Christofle enjoyed the fresh fall air. The sun brightened the golden leaves as they fell softly to the ground. Halloween was just around the corner. The beauty of the crystal-clear morning triggered a pleasant reverie of reminiscence for Jolene. She remembered long-ago autumn walks through Sacajawea Park, jumping into huge piles of leaves, and her own student days at Chief Joseph School. And now Jolene had returned.

Last spring, Jolene officially retired after 20 rewarding years as an elementary school principal. Not finding retirement interesting or satisfying, she chose to return to the classroom as a substitute teacher for the local district. Today, Jolene found herself about to work in the school she remembered so fondly from years gone by. What a delight!

Jolene was substituting for Mrs. Goldenberry, who was about to give birth to her first child. This meant that the job would probably last for several weeks. When she had talked on the phone to Mrs. Goldenberry last evening, they had discussed major content objectives, methodology, and materials. Mrs. Goldenberry described her students as a rather good group of eighth graders. True, there were the adolescent problems of raging hormones and rampant insecurity. The women chuckled at the thought of how tall the girls were at this age and how short most boys were by comparison. Jolene commented on how nature played an ugly trick on this age group.

Jolene's first day progressed fairly well. There was the usual testing of limits by the students who tried to gauge her level of tolerance. Yet no student pranks seemed to be able to burst her ebullient mood. During the morning, there was a great deal of chatter going on between three girls—Samantha Bell, Kaitlin Book, and Esmaralda Candle. Jolene corrected their behavior and resumed the lesson. About an hour later, Jolene once again noticed that Bell, Book, and Candle were out of order. The girls appeared to be passing notes back and forth. Jolene continued with her lesson on acid rain and at the same time casually wandered back among the students. Catching Kaitlin Book by surprise, Jolene asked for the note that she had in her hand. At first, the girl appeared shocked but quickly regained her composure as she silently handed over the note. As Jolene pocketed the folded paper, she told the girls, "No more notes." Again, Jolene went back to her lesson.

The remainder of the morning was uneventful. As they were breaking for lunch, Kaitlin Book walked up to her and asked her for the note. Jolene responded in a good-natured manner that, for now, she was going to hold on to it.

During the lunch period, Jolene sat with the other teachers, renewed some old acquaintances, and established new ones. She inquired about the three girls and was told that they were very verbal and sometimes difficult but that they were basically "nice latchkey kids."

When Jolene went back to her classroom to began the afternoon lesson, she immediately noticed that Bell, Book, and Candle had not returned from lunch. The other students insisted that they had no idea where the girls might be. Jolene picked up her desk phone and notified the office that the girls were missing.

Shortly thereafter, Jolene was called to the office by Principal Harry Rettop. Mr. Rettop behaved very coldly. He stiffly informed

Jolene that the girls were not in the building and that they would not be returning to the classroom. With tight lips, Principal Rettop ordered Jolene to immediately clear out her desk and leave. When she asked him what was going on, Mr. Rettop responded, "You have violated our trust. I'm horrified! The girls have told me about your inappropriate sexual advances toward them. They and their parents are very distraught. I've been instructed to refrain from directly discussing this manner any further with you."

Mr. Rettop summarily dismissed Jolene by saying, "You will be hearing from our school attorney in the near future. Good day, Mrs. Christofle." Jolene was utterly shattered.

In a daze she returned to the classroom, gathered her belongings, and headed for the front door. Jolene saw Mr. Rettop, arms folded on his chest, silently shadowing her to and from the classroom and, then again down the hallway to the front door. How dare the man! He was literally escorting her from the building. When Jolene started her car, she looked back to see a frowning Mr. Rettop staring at her from the entrance.

Epilogue. While driving home, Jolene remembered the note that she had taken away from Kaitlin Book earlier that day. As soon as she parked the car in her driveway, Jolene opened up the folded paper and read. The note was a discussion between the three girls about an after-school party they planned to have with three boys at one of their homes. The note stated in very graphic detail the sexual activities the girls planned to engage in with the boys. The girls even discussed how much time they would have until the working parents arrived home. They expressed confidence that they would have several hours of privacy.

Immediately on entering her home, Jolene called her personal attorney and shared the day's events with him. The attorney scheduled a meeting for the following morning. Again, Jolene recounted the previous day's events and gave the note to him. He told her that he would handle the situation. He did this by calling the school district's attorney and setting up a meeting between the school attorney, Principal Rettop, and himself.

Jolene never learned the specifics of what transpired at that meeting. Her lawyer explained, however, that all accusations against her were dropped and nothing about the incident would ever be put into her record. As far as Jolene knew, Bell, Book, and Candle were never

reprimanded. She never received an apology or an acknowledgment of mistreatment from the students or their families, Mr. Rettop, or the school district.

After the incident, Jolene continued to work as a substitute teacher in the surrounding school districts. Principal Rettop was replaced the following year. Jolene was never again called to sub at Chief Joseph School or any other school in that school district.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

The 250 teachers surveyed rated being falsely accused a solid 5—most taxing. Although only one in five related that he or she had ever been falsely or unjustly accused, all admitted they felt vulnerable and feared that this could happen to them. Teachers explained that they were not sure of how to proceed if this type of confrontation occurred. They were unclear about their rights and protections. This held true for tenured (permanent), contract nontenured, and temporary teachers. In recent years, there has been a rash of lawsuits brought to the courts regarding sexual misconduct in schools. Administrators, teachers, and students have been accused of or claimed to be victims of sexual improprieties. From sexual harassment to assault, precedent-setting cases and court interpretation have been rapidly changing in the past 10 years (Kosmoski, 1999; Eskenazi & Gallen, 1991). Yet another consideration is the fact that few districts have clear procedures for reporting and dealing with allegations of sexual misconduct. Most districts are unprepared to fairly treat victims and the accused in these encounters (Shankeshaft & Cohan, 1995). Teachers feel unsupported. Since teachers are confused and apprehensive, districts are unprepared, and the law continues to change, it becomes clear that this form of encounter deserves close examination and discussion.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About Students Who Falsely Accuse Their Teachers?

In this scenario, we are dealing with a set of students who do not want to be held accountable for their behavior. This is common behavior for adolescents. Their perspective is shortsighted and immediate. Their only interest is to cover up their own behavior and avoid being punished by their parents. So they concoct a lie. They are not concerned with how malicious or devastating the lie is to their victim. Rather, they are concerned with taking the pressure off of themselves and placing it on someone else. Bell, Book, and Candle know that in our present society, those accused of sexual misconduct are virtually guilty until proven innocent. They do not care what effect their behavior will have on the emotional status or livelihood of the teacher they accuse. The girls engage in lying strictly because it works.

Kashy and DePaulo (1996), in their article "Who Lies," discuss the research on Machiavellian personality. People described as being Machiavellian see others in a cynical light. They have little concern for the social or moral conventions of society. They engage in lying, cheating, and the manipulation of others to achieve their own goals. Unfortunately, these individuals are all too successful in achieving their goals through devious means. Perhaps even worse, people high in Machiavellianism are liked and admired more than those who are low in Machiavellianism. Because their lying is rewarded, manipulative people lie more often than people who are low in the personality construct. Such people openly describe themselves as successful liars. They are aware that they lie more often than others, but are unashamed.

What did the girls want to accomplish by their lie? They wanted the spotlight to be taken off their own behavior and placed on someone else. They wanted the confiscated note either forgotten or at least ignored. Bell, Book, and Candle wanted Jolene punished for taking their note and jeopardizing their own situation.

In this real-life story, the lie worked. All the girls wanted to accomplish was accomplished. When we review the events of this vignette, the trio's success was astonishing. The girls were allowed to return to their classroom and the teacher was sent home. To our knowledge, the

students were never punished by the school for their behavior. Jolene was never asked to substitute in that school district again. We never learn if the girls were punished by their parents. This is a case where Machiavellian behavior worked.

We think more disturbing is a widely held belief by educational professionals themselves that at least some of their accused peers must be guilty when sexual accusations are made (Berliner & Loftus, 1992). Although theoretically this seems a rational position, it does imply that we believe that accused educators are getting away with improper behavior. Although most juries find teachers innocent, fellow educators are skeptical. It is not a theoretical problem to the person who is accused. Rather, it is an "Alice in Wonderland," backward world in which the innocent are guilty and the guilty are innocent. It is no wonder that teachers are subjected to lifelong stigma after an accusation occurs. A recent conversation with Jolene revealed that several years after the event she is still hurt and angry about the accusation made against her and the way it was handled. She believes that an apology was in order from both the accusers and the principal.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle Being Falsely Accused by Her Students of Sexual Misconduct?

This true story is so unfair! Sometimes educators are faced with situations that are completely unfair to them or their students. This is one of those cases. The ending is unjust, disgusting, and pitiful. Although this vignette leaves us distraught and bitter, we can learn much from examining Jolene Christofle's experience.

First, it should be noted that the events that led to Jolene being escorted from Chief Joseph School were out of her hands. Jolene's behavior as a substitute was clearly appropriate and professional. Examples of her exemplary actions include maintaining classroom control with good management techniques, promptly reporting that the girls were missing, trying to learn what had happened, and complying with Harry Rettop's order to vacate the premises. Although the scenario clearly describes how Jolene was "shattered" by the accusation, she maintained her dignity and never lost control. It would not be hard to imagine that such an encounter might cause an individual to

scream, threaten, or burst into tears. To her credit, Jolene resorted to none of these behaviors.

How Jolene proceeded after the humiliating removal shows great savvy and courage. First, her ability to reason and logically interpret demonstrated that she was able to remain rational during this stressful time. She recognized that the note was the probable reason Bell, Book, and Candle falsely accused her.

Second, Jolene had the good sense to seek professional assistance. Law is not our profession and we do not know the intricacies of our legal system. It is only common sense to find help when we are blindsided and find ourselves in over our heads. Since Jolene had no representation from the local teacher's organization or bargaining unit, she was wise to immediately contact her private attorney.

The one questionable decision Jolene made during this fiasco was choosing not to pursue the matter after the school district informed her that the matter would be dropped. Too many questions were left unanswered or unsatisfactorily resolved. Were her liberty and property rights violated by the school? Does she have cause to sue the parents of the girls or the school for damage to her reputation? Why was she never called to sub again in this district? Or was she better off letting the matter die?

A Clinical View

From a clinical perspective, sexual accusations are one of the most devastating encounters that one could face. If this happens, the present rules remove all control from you. You are given a label from which you may never completely escape. You are immediately put on the defensive, even when there is no evidence. Your natural responses are going to be dismay, anxiety, anger, depression, and despair.

Jolene Christofle did a remarkable job when faced with false sexual accusations. She exemplified a series of prudent behaviors that have proven effective in like circumstances. You can learn much from Jolene's experience and subsequent actions.

There are steps that you should immediately take to survive a similar situation.

1. Do not panic. This is the time to keep your head and stay cool, even though your heart tells you otherwise.

2. Do not say a word to anyone, including the principal or police, once an accusation is made. Your words may be taken out of context and used against you.
3. Contact your personal attorney. Tell him or her of the accusation, but do not discuss the situation in depth by phone. As soon as possible, discuss the matter in person with your attorney.
4. Contact your support system (significant other, immediate family, a very close friend) and inform these persons of the accusations and circumstance. Speak only to those closest to you. It is your support system that is going to get you through this situation.
5. Contact the district union representative. Learn what services and representation they will provide. (Note: This case is a good illustration of why you should always carry professional insurance.)
6. Go home and write down everything that you can remember about the event and the involved parties. In this case, you would write about the students, your interactions with them, and their families. You should write down your experiences with the principal. This written record should be kept in a safe place and be "for your eyes only." Remember, anything that you have written down may be subpoenaed by the attorney working on behalf of the accuser.
7. All steps taken after this will be determined jointly by you and your attorney. After taking these steps, you can begin to focus on understanding why a person has attacked you. A therapist can be useful in this situation. Even if you cannot understand the accuser's motivation, you can come to a better understanding of yourself and your own reactions to the accusation.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

Our peers provide us with a number of suggestions we can call on if we are ever falsely accused. We can use those that are most appropriate for the situation we face.

1. Most teachers have a number of built-in protections. These are the kind of situations where we must use them. Tenured and contract teachers are protected by their teachers organization or union. They are entitled to legal counsel and have paid for representation through their regular dues. If you are falsely accused of sexual misconduct or any other unfounded charge is made against you, insist on representation.

2. Bring your building or districtwide representative to all meetings. This person will serve as a credible witness to all that transpired. In essence, it is a form of documentation and therefore a protection.

3. As employees of a district, teachers are also entitled to representation and support from the district itself. If accused by students or any outside source, your contract usually ensures representation by your district's attorney. Protection of temporary or noncontracted teachers varies from state to state (LaMorte, 1990; Strahan & Turner, 1995).

4. Consider how precious your reputation is to you, both as an individual and a teaching professional. Under the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, you do have the legal right to protection from slander (oral) and libel (written) defamation. The courts have ruled that students, teachers, or other parties may be awarded damages from schools and school officials if their individual civil rights are suppressed (Alexander & Alexander, 1998; Ferrandino, 1999; Kaiser, 1993). If you have reason to believe that the aforementioned counsel are unconcerned or unsatisfactorily defending your personal civil rights, acquiring an outside attorney might be advisable. Many teachers dismiss this option because they feel they cannot shoulder the financial burden. This is an ungrounded fear. Civil liberty organizations and local bar associations often provide services to individuals at no cost or at no up-front cost.

5. This vignette never mentions if Jolene Christofle has liability insurance. She, along with all teachers, should carry this type of insurance. Most school districts carry some insurance on its faculty. Most state and national teachers organizations provide, through the annual membership fee, some coverage for members. In most cases, however, the amount of multiple coverage held by teachers is insufficient if the matter goes to court and the teacher loses. Teachers are strongly ad-

vised to purchase additional coverage that will ensure adequate protection. This type of insurance is available at low cost through teacher organizations as well as independent carriers.

6. As in the case of Jolene Christofle, teachers not under contract must ensure their own personal protection. They should belong to state and national teacher organizations. They should consider the purchase of additional liability insurance protection to safeguard their possessions. Like all Americans, they could contact organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union if their rights are jeopardized. The option of contacting a civil rights organization is open to all teachers regardless of their contractual status.

7. Take all false accusations seriously. These are not harmless pranks, but rather malicious doings that have devastating consequences. Rally your support system. Do not engage in fantasy and expect Harry Potter, boy wizard (Rowlings, 1998), to save the day. Rather, seek out professional help and your emotional supporters.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

A false accusation could occur at any time during our career. A spotless reputation and seemingly supportive colleagues are no guarantee that a teacher will remain immune. Sexual or other unfounded accusations can come from students, peers, parents, or our superordinates. Understanding this sad fact is in itself some protection. If we are forewarned, we will be better prepared when and if this distasteful confrontation occurs.

Unfortunately, many teachers are unaware of the reality of our times regarding accusations and possible litigation. Doing right is not always the motive for others' actions. Pragmatics sometimes take precedence. Today, most districts have elected school board members with certain beliefs. First, many of these well-meaning individuals dearly wish to avoid any publicity that can in any way be construed as damaging to the district or themselves. They would much prefer to handle accusations quietly. They see little benefit to supporting and defending an individual teacher and his or her reputation. Also, pursuing right in the court is most costly. Board members often feel obliged to oppose court spending whenever possible. This is sometimes referred to as "prevent litigation" (Strahan & Turner, 1995). It

should also be noted that some local union leaders hold the same beliefs. Because of these facts, many districts and their teacher representatives will strongly urge teachers to refrain from countersuits. An individual teacher's reputation becomes secondary to these people.

Knowing this reality leads us to a sad truth. False accusations are occurring frequently in our society. This includes our schools. We must become cognizant of our guaranteed rights and protections. We must take the necessary steps to protect ourselves before tragedy strikes. And we must understand that our decision to defend ourselves publicly might not be wholeheartedly supported by our colleagues, administrators, or districts.

Summary

- A false sexual or other unfounded accusation can blindside us at any time during our career.
- Teachers do have rights and protections from allegations of misconduct.
- We must become familiar with these rights and be prudent enough to find professional assistance.
- We must understand that many school people would prefer to deal with any false accusation as quietly as possible. Many will not support our action to actively and publicly defend ourselves. Often this is a personal and moral decision we must make by ourselves.
- There is legal counsel and liability insurance available to all teachers. We must make sure we are adequately protected.
- Finally, we must accept that some situations are unfair and will not be resolved justly.

Suggested Readings

Kosmoski, G. J. (1999). Recognizing and dealing with harassment. In *How to land the best jobs in school administration* (Rev. ed., chap. 7). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Shankeshaft, C., & Cohan, A. (1995). Sexual abuse of students by school personnel. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(7), 512-521.

References

Alexander, K., & Alexander, M. D. (1998). *American public school law* (4th ed.). New York: West.

Berliner, L., & Loftus, E. (1992). Sexual abuse accusations: Desperately seeking reconciliation. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 7*(4), 570-578.

Eskenazi, M., & Gallen, D. (1991). *Sexual harrassment: Know your rights.* New York: Carroll & Graf.

Ferrandino, V. L. (1999, September 20). *Suing the schools. How litigation is taking a toll on education.* Chicago: Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

Kaiser, J. (1993). *Educational administration* (2nd ed.). Mequon, WI: Stylex.

Kashy, D., & DePaulo, B. (1996). Who lies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(5), 1037-1051.

Kosmoski, G. J. (1999). *How to land the best jobs in school administration* (rev. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

LaMorte, M. (1990). *School law: Cases and concepts* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rowlings, J. K. (1998). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone.* New York: Scholastic Press.

Shankeshaft, C., & Cohan, A. (1995). Sexual abuse of students by school personnel. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(7), 512-521.

Strahan, R. D., & Turner, L. C. (1995). *The courts and the schools.* New York: Longman.

8

Curbing the School Gossip

THE STORY: I Had No Idea!

THE PLACE: A Metropolitan Magnet Junior High School

Jennifer Newburg put her frozen dinner into the microwave oven and opened her diet soft drink. She glanced out the lunchroom window and smiled as she saw the first snow flurries of the year. So many firsts! This was her first year as a teacher and her first year living away from home. And now this would be her first winter in the city. Jennifer—Jen to her friends and colleagues—felt very happy and pleased with her life.

When the microwave buzzer announced that her lunch was ready, she gathered the food and settled at an empty table near the front of the room. This late in the day, the only other people in the room were Carl Jabber, one of the district's permanent subs, and two women wearing badges that indicated that they were parent or community volunteers. The trio was engaged in light banter at a table at the far end of the room. Since the room was virtually empty, Jen could not help overhearing their conversation.

Carl was entertaining the women with a story about a mix-up at one of the neighboring elementary schools. He explained that the principal had sent out a school holiday closing notice with the wrong date and that this action had caused big problems for the school and the district office. When he concluded that this was yet another example of how disorganized that principal was and called him "Mr. Clueless," the volunteers laughed.

Following this exchange, one of the volunteers looked at her watch and nudged her partner. She announced that they were late and had to return immediately to the media center. Quickly, the women gathered their belongings, bid their farewells, nodded to Jen, and rushed from the room.

Before the door swung shut, Carl grabbed his mug and moved over to Jen's table. As he took the seat directly opposite her, Cari queried, "So, Jen Newburg, what's new with our prize neophyte?"

"Not much," Jen replied. "I'm finally feeling like I'm getting the hang of this thing. My classes have been going pretty well and I have better control of the kids." Jen continued to munch on her lunch. She had heard that Carl talked too much and she should be careful of what she said to him. But he seemed pretty nice and she really had nothing to hide.

Breaking into her thoughts, Carl continued, "That's great. So many new teachers have trouble with classroom management. I bet Jean Solomon had something to do with that."

"She sure did. Jean is a great mentor and knows everything about classroom discipline. She has spent a lot of time helping me develop classroom management skills, and it sure is paying off. Maybe we disagree about some things, but she sure is right about how to handle preteens."

Carl grinned and nodded. Then he changed the subject. "Enough shop talk. Tell me about you. How's living in the city? Do you have your own apartment or what?"

"Oh, I'm so lucky. Within a week of landing this job, I answered an ad in the paper to share an apartment in this neighborhood. The woman who placed the ad is a loan officer for National Bank and we hit it off right away. She's great. She gives me lots of privacy and has truly become a friend. She has even introduced me to some very nice artists and businesspeople. It's a terrific arrangement and the price was wonderful for this high-rent area."

As Jen finished talking, Jean Solomon popped her head into the lunchroom and said, "There you are. I need to see you before sixth period. How about walking with me?"

Jen disposed of the remnants of her lunch, said good-bye to Carl, and met Jean in the hallway. As they walked toward their wing, Jean rounded on her. "What was that all about? Didn't anyone tell you that Carl Jabber is the world's greatest gossip? He's always stirring up trouble, and if he doesn't have any juicy tidbits he's not above making them up. Stay away from that guy. He's nothing but trouble."

Jen felt her cheeks turn red. She gave Jean a wry smile and quietly responded, "Jean, it wasn't that bad. Don't worry. Carl was really nice and I didn't tell him anything important. I promise to be more careful the next time. I had no idea!" The two women, mentor and novice, proceeded in silence down the hall.

Epilogue. Within one year, Jen's innocent comments to Carl Jabber came back to haunt her on two occasions. About 6 weeks after the lunchroom encounter, a fellow teacher asked if there was any truth to the rumor that she and Jean had many disagreements and the only thing they could agree on was discipline techniques. Jen remembered the lunchroom incident. Then the following fall, Richard Lansing asked Jen out on a date. During their dinner, Richard sheepishly admitted that he had postponed asking her out because he had heard that she lived a lifestyle very different from his. He explained that he was told that she lived in a very expensive part of the city and only socialized with powerful artistic and business people. He seriously wondered if they had anything in common or if Jen would even consider dating him. Jen was flabbergasted. She never positively knew if Carl Jabber fabricated, embellished, and spread this rumor, but she highly suspected that he did.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Study participants rated dealing with the school gossip as a 3—stressful. They found such individuals an irritation and in some cases a threat. This type of situation merits examination because all 250 teachers surveyed freely admit that they have had to deal with a gossip during their career. All report that they have a "Carl Jabber clone" in their

building. Few felt that they dealt satisfactorily with this kind of person. They felt this taxing situation caused them stress on a daily basis.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	**Stressful**	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About People Who Gossip and Fabricate Stories?

Some individuals consider gossiping and lying art forms. Both actions involve a feeling of power and control. Most gossips want to be "in the information loop" or "in the know." Gossips feel that by sharing information, whether it be important or trivial, they are intimately involved with others. To gossips, the message itself is not as important as the perception of power and closeness it creates. Nor are gossips concerned with the effects of the shared information on the listener or the person about whom they gossip. By contrast, gossips who are pathological liars are concerned with gaining personal advantage. This type of gossip has a diabolical purpose. The message such gossips create is designed to influence either the listener, the party being gossiped about, or a third party not immediately involved in the process.

In this vignette, we do not see any long-term advantage for Carl because of the lies he told. The shared information does give Carl the perception of an immediate reward of closeness and self-aggrandizement in the telling. He apparently does not see any danger in the lie because he believes the person he is talking about, Jen, is new to the district and not highly ranked in the district or school interpersonal hierarchy. He does not perceive the negative influence his lie has on Jen. We may surmise from his adeptness that Carl is an inveterate liar. When there is a choice between a truthful communication and a juicy flavored tidbit, Carl seems to go for the juicy tidbit every time. Carl continues his gossiping behavior because it is rewarding to him.

This is the danger of gossip in any setting. The gossip can have unintended consequences. Jen is hurt by Carl's gossip and she does not immediately know it. It takes her a year to find out how Carl has influenced her life. The only consequence we know of is that Richard

chooses not to ask her for a date. When Richard shared the juicy tidbit with her, it does not have nearly the same effect on her that it had on Carl. She is hurt and chagrined. How can anyone do this to her? She has been happy and content with her life for the past year, and all that time the rumor has been spreading that she has a lifestyle that makes her unapproachable, elitist, and antisocial. The rumor has kept her from having a relationship with Richard until he overcame his trepidation. A major problem with being the victim of negative gossip is not knowing how many other relationships are influenced during one's lifetime. Another problem is that Jen can never prove who was the instigator of the rumor.

What do experts know about rumors and gossip? Consider the following information.

Rumors. DiFonso, Bordia, and Rosnow (1994) explain that there are three stages to a rumor: creation, evaluation, and dissemination. Rumor generation and transmission result from an optimal combination of personal anxiety, general uncertainty, credulity, and outcome-relevant involvement (Rosnow, 1991). Both men and women may be victims and perpetrators of rumors. Walker and Blaine (1991) found that women, more than men, are affected by the dissemination of a dread (negative) rumor.

To handle rumors, Iyer and Debevec (1991) suggest that if the person or object of the rumor is held in low esteem, then the best action is to ignore the rumor. But if the person or object of the rumor is held in high esteem, a refutation of the rumor is in order. They recommend that a conciliatory approach might be best, even if it is not the first choice.

Gossip. Experts suggest that gossip may be intrinsic to organization life. They claim it may be a form of escapism as well as a method of organizational mobility (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Both genders participate in gossip. Additional studies show that female pairs are more likely to engage in negative gossip than cross-gender pairs or male pairs. Women are more likely to give positive comments to negative gossip (Leaper & Holliday, 1995).

We can apply this information about rumors and gossip to the above scenario. Although gossip is part of organizational life, this encounter cannot be ignored. Jen Newburg was hurt and her image dis-

torted. She was a woman held in high esteem by others—peers, students, and her mentor. The false rumors and gossip about Jen should be refuted. Carl Jabber needs to be confronted about his behavior.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the School Gossip?

Poor Jen Newburg! We can all sympathize and empathize with the naïveté of a young novice teacher. Most of us can remember that when we entered our profession we had an unrealistic and inflated opinion of veteran teachers (Armstrong, Hensen, & Savage, 1993; Spring, 1991). Many of us idolized these icons. We failed to recognize that teachers are human with a host of human frailties. We therefore can understand and easily forgive Jen for this lapse in good judgment.

But it must be noted that Jen was forewarned, yet she dismissed or did not recognize two obvious warnings. First, the vignette made it clear that she had been previously warned by her colleagues and she deliberately chose to ignore the advice. ("She had heard that Carl talked too much and she should be careful of what she said to him. But he seemed pretty nice and she really had nothing to hide."). Second, she personally observed him carrying a tale about the errant neighboring elementary school principal. She actually heard Carl's cruel and uncensored remarks about the man. Not only were Carl's comments a breach of confidentiality, but they were very damaging to the unsuspecting principal. Both of the aforementioned incidents should have served as very loud "mental siren" to Jen. She had been warned. She witnessed Carl's unprofessional behavior. Jen should have reasoned that Carl was indeed a cruel, sharp-tongued gossip and probably an accomplished fabricator. Gossips deliberately reveal personal or sensational information about others. Fabricators go further. They invent and twist facts and events for deception and sensationalism. This seems to accurately describe Carl Jabber.

Jen should have avoided him and screened any and all comments she made in his presence. Goodlad (1990) and Hall (1992) remind teachers that there are some individuals—colleagues—who can be detrimental to maintaining educational professionalism.

The one thing that Jen did well after her social faux pas was to heed the advice of her mentor and avoid future conversations with Carl. Mentors can be an excellent source of practical wisdom and common sense in any given situation (Darling-Hammond & Barnett, 1988;

Glickman, 1990). They often serve as a buffer for the novices they mentor (Healy & Welchert, 1990).

A Clinical View

Jen never had a chance in this scenario. She was new, naïve, and unaware of the politics that take place in schools. When she shared information, she was doing what she thought was both expected and appropriate of her. She was just making light conversation. There is "situational demand" in an encounter such as this. Carl was an old hand, someone who had been around. He was a district veteran. Jen unwittingly gave him respect that he did not deserve. Why would she not answer the questions posed to her by Carl? Jen had no college courses designed to help her manage school politics.

One asset Jen had in this vignette was her mentor. The current educational research clearly demonstrates that the acquisition and use of a mentor has great professional, psychological, and physiological benefits. The literature defines a qualified mentor as an individual who is highly successful in the field and has much experience to draw on. The literature further characterizes the mentor as a person willing to freely share his or her expertise with the mentee, novice, or protégé (Huling-Austin, 1990; Kosmoski, 1999, 2000; Kosmoski & Pollack, 1997, 1998, 2000; Merriam, 1993). Although Jen initially made the mistake of confiding in Carl, she learned from the encounter and heeded the advice of her competent mentor, Jean. In so doing, Jen avoided being victimized in the future.

Remember, by participating in gossip actively or passively, you may be making others the unwitting victims of your actions. If you do not want it to happen to you, do not do it to yourself or others.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

Study participants and experts in organizational communications provide us with several suggestions. Their suggestions may be applied to our professional and personal lives.

1. Carl Jabber's damaging story regarding the unsuspecting elementary school principal reminds teachers of the importance of confidentiality. Both legally and ethically, we are bound to keep student in-

formation and school business confidential. Today, most schools welcome and encourage the active participation of community and parent volunteers. We invite them to be part of the daily events. We value their contributions (Chambers, 1998; Hansen & Childs, 1998; Pool, 1998). But we often find these volunteers dropping in to "gripe central," the teachers lounge or lunchroom. Sometimes we become so comfortable with their presence that we forget they are not staff members. Even veteran teachers can fall into the trap of sharing what should be confidential matters with these people. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we have a responsibility to personally monitor and screen sensitive information.

2. This scenario implied that after the disastrous lunchroom encounter Jen avoided Carl Jabber. Good for her! This is generally the best tactic when dealing with gossips. Any conversation with this kind of individual can have unpleasant and long-lasting effects. These people often turn an innocent remark into a damaging and juicy statement. Why help them? Why provide them with any information that will make you or your constituents a target or character in their next fabrication? Why provide them with fodder for their evil gristmill?

3. If you discovered a true gossip in your school, consider warning your colleagues. Why protect the gossip? Is it not your responsibility and allegiance to your coworkers? Protect them.

4. Finally, if a gossip refuses to leave you alone and does not realize that you are trying to avoid her or him, it is time for strong measures. Confront the person. Tell the individual you have neither the time nor desire to engage in gossip.

In Which Other Cases Do the Learned Techniques Apply?

The "1-2-3 approach" should work in all settings and with gossips and fabricators of every ilk. Remember:

1. *Avoid*, if possible.
2. *Warn* your colleagues.
3. *Confront*, when necessary.

The avoid-warn-confront technique can also be applied when dealing with individuals whose behavior we disdain. For example, if you find

smutty jokes or foul language distasteful and must interact with an individual who engages in these verbal expressions, try this strategy.

Summary

- Gossips and fabricators are rampant among the ranks of educators. Colleagues attest that they all have had encounters with this type of individual.
- Teachers find encounters with gossips a source of nagging daily stress. They find them both dangerous and repugnant.
- The venomous remarks of these individuals can have devastating and far-reaching results. Teachers have the right to defend themselves from these malicious people.
- The best way to curb most gossips is to avoid them. Give them no ammunition to attack you or others.
- If avoidance alone does not curb the school gossip, use the rest of the 1-2-3 approach: Avoid, warn, confront.

Suggested Readings

Darling-Hammond, L., & Barnett, B. (1988). *The evolution of teacher policy*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Goodlad, J. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

References

Armstrong, D. G., Hensen, K. T., & Savage, T. V. (1993). *Education: An introduction* (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Chambers, L. (1998). How customer-friendly is your school? *Educational Leadership, 56*(2), 33-35.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Barnett, B. (1988). *The evolution of teacher policy*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

DiFonzo, N., Bordia, P., & Rosnow, R. (1994). Reining in rumors. *Organizational Dynamics, 23*(1), 47-62.

Glickman, C. D. (1990). Preface. In T. M. Bey & C. T. Holmes (Eds.), *On mentoring: Developing successful teachers*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.

Goodlad, J. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, G. (1992). Induction: The missing link. *Journal of Education, 33*(3), 53-55.

Hansen, M., & Childs, J. (1998). Creating a school where people like to be. *Educational Leadership, 56*(1), 14-17.

Healy, C., & Welchert, A. (1990). Mentoring relations: A definition to advance research and practice. *Educational Researcher, 19*(9), 17-21.

Huling-Austin, L. (1990). Mentoring is squishy business. In T. M. Bey & C. T. Holmes (Eds.), *On mentoring: Developing successful teachers*. Arlington, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.

Iyer, E. & Debevec, K. (1991). Origin of rumor and tone of message in rumor quelling techniques. *Psychology and Marketing, 8*(3), 161-175.

Kosmoski, G. J. (1999). *How to land the best jobs in school administration* (Rev. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Kosmoski, G. J. (2000). *Supervision* (2nd ed.). Mequon, WI: Stylex.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (1997, February). *Effects of a mentor program for beginning school administrators*. Paper presented at the National Conference of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head, SC.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (Speakers). (1998, February/March). *From Jekyll to Hyde: The changes of beginning school administrators*. Cassette Recording (No. AASA98-80) for the American Association of School Administrators 130th National Conference on Education, San Diego, CA.

Kosmoski, G. J., & Pollack, D. R. (2000). *Managing difficult, frustrating, and hostile conversations: Strategies for savvy administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Leaper, C., & Holliday, H. (1995). Gossip in same-gender friends' conversations. *Personal Relationships, 2*(3), 237-246.

Merriam, S. (1993). Mentor and proteges: A critical review of the literature. *Adult Education Quarterly, 33*(3), 161-173.

Noon, M., & Delbridge, R. (1993). News from behind my hand: Gossip in organizations. *Organizational Studies, 14*(1), 23-36.

Pool, C. R. (1998). A safe and caring place. *Educational Leadership, 55*(4), 73-77.

Rosnow, R. (1991). Inside rumor. *American Psychologist, 46*(5), 484-496.

Spring, J. (1991). *American education: An introduction to social and political aspects* (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Walker, C., & Blaine, B. (1991). The virulence of dread rumors: A field experiment. *Language and Communication, 11*(4), 291-297.

9

Reversing a Nonsupportive Action

THE STORY: Sabotaged by Your Superior

THE PLACE: Neil A. Armstrong High School on the West Coast of Florida

As Terrence Michael O'Malley circulated between the work stations in his construction class, he felt a nudge on the back of his left arm. Turning around, he saw David Barber grinning and wagging an entry slip. Terry grabbed the note and read swiftly. He could not believe what he read. Just to be sure he had made no mistake, he read the comment section a second time. It read, "Readmit David Barber to your 4th-period class. His suspension is rescinded and he is to be reinstated." The form was signed by the new vice principal of discipline, Debra Hastings. Terry shoved the paper into his pocket, glared at David, and snapped, "Right. So go to your usual station and get to work."

The next 25 minutes were unbearable. The students whispered among themselves. Some giggled as word spread about what transpired. A friend of David's actually called out, "That-a-way to go, man." A very few students seemed dismayed and disgusted.

By the time the passing bell rang, Terry was furious. He grabbed his desk phone and dialed Ms. Hastings's extension. He spoke to her secretary and made an appointment for the end of the school day.

As Terry entered the vice principal's office, he was still seething. He could not understand how this woman could deliberately undermine his authority and not back him up. Was she a coward, was she out to get him, or was she just plain stupid? Terry wasted no time on amenities. He stalked across Ms. Hastings's office and handed her the reentry form. Then he exploded. "Just what the hell is going on here? Ms. Hastings, you need to explain this and make it good."

The smile vanished from the vice principal's face as she waved him into the chair in front of her desk. As Terry sat down, Ms. Hastings retorted, "Now hold it, Terry. Don't you start yelling at me. I don't need this at the end of the day. There's a lot going on here you don't know about."

Terry broke in, "Sure. And there are a lot of things you don't apparently know about either. First, this kid is a real troublemaker. No self-control. Cruel. He flung a circular saw blade halfway across my shop and it stuck in the wall. We are very lucky that no one was seriously hurt or killed. Do you realize that my classroom rules clearly state that using any tool or equipment in a threatening manner will result in an automatic suspension and possible expulsion? How could you undercut me? Do you have any idea of how hard it will be for me to keep control in my class after what you've done? Has the new vice principal of discipline conveniently forgotten that Armstrong has a no tolerance policy? Just where do you get off?"

As the last words spilled out of his mouth, he gulped in a big breath. Terry realized that he was speaking too fast and too loudly. He did not care. He was angry and he was right. At the very least, Ms. Hastings deserved a tongue lashing.

The vice principal glared at him and then surprisingly responded in a low, dispassionate, conversational tone. "I do know all those things. I also know that it is my job to investigate any teacher's *request* for suspension and make the final recommendation for action to the principal." Ms. Hastings sent Terry a clear message as she emphasized and stressed the word *request*.

She continued before Terry could respond, "I'm sure you are aware that there is a procedure in place to appeal my decision. You can go over my head with this, but before you do, there are a few more details you should know. First, there are a number of things you didn't do very well. Where is the list of witnesses? Or where is your statement that you personally observed David's action? With no proper

documentation, all I have here is hearsay. After teaching for 20 plus years, you should know better than that."

Terry folded his arms across his chest and stared in disbelief as Ms. Hastings's onslaught continued, "Second, I met with David, his mother, and her new live-in boyfriend this morning. What a turnaround. The adults were very supportive. In the past 2 years, every time David has been in trouble, the mother could have cared less. Now she and her significant other are offering to work with us and do whatever we think best. Believe that one! And finally, for your information, David insists that he did not deliberately throw the blade. He admits he was horsing around with it in his hand but claims it was an accident when the blade slipped out and flew across the room. This is the first time I've ever seen David truly contrite and sorry for his actions. He actually agreed it was a dumb thing to do, said he was sorry, and promised to be a lot more careful in the future."

Still looking Terry directly in the eye, Ms. Hastings leaned forward, nodded, and slowly iterated, " Terry, you can try to buck me on this, but you'll lose. Everyone from our principal to the school board will back me up on this one."

As she leaned back in her chair, Ms. Hastings gave Terry a crooked smile and delivered the final verbal blow. "Lighten up, Terry. Give the kid a chance. Who knows? Just maybe, this new guy at home will turn David around. I'm afraid I can't and won't back you on this one."

Leaping out of his chair as he shook his fist, Terry screamed, "Are you really this ignorant or are you just naturally stupid? Read my lips. David is dangerous. Just understand that anything bad that comes of this is on your head!"

Terry could not recollect how the meeting had ended or how he had gotten out of the office. The first thing he clearly remembered was standing in the hall, dragging in air, his heart pounding, completely dumbfounded. Debra Hastings was a traitor, turncoat, bleeding heart, snake in the grass. What was in the mind of this gutless wonder? She had chosen not to support him or his efforts to teach and maintain a safe environment. Rather, this "do-gooder" had chosen to coddle a longtime troublemaker. She did not care one bit about her teachers or the rights of the good kids.

For almost a week after his meeting with Vice Principal Hastings, Terry O'Malley replayed the events of this confrontation in his mind and grieved. He finally came to a number of sad conclusions. Terry be-

lieved that he was virtually on his own and could never expect administrative support for his discipline practices. He felt that he would never trust any superior again, and he questioned if he really wanted to be a teacher—an educator. He was genuinely disgusted by the profession.

Terry never appealed Vice Principal Hastings's action or spoke of their confrontation again. As best as he could, Terry avoided any interaction with all of his administrators and most of his colleagues.

Epilogue. During the next 3 years life-changing events occurred to the participants in this vignette. Ms. Hastings married and relocated with her new husband elsewhere in Florida. Terry never knew if she continued her career as a school administrator. At age 16, David Barber was arrested, tried as an adult, and found guilty of shooting and killing a 10-year-old girl. He is now serving 25 years to life at the state penitentiary. And what of Terry O'Malley? After teaching for 2 more years and sticking much to himself, Terry accepted an early retirement package. He is now working as a nonunion carpenter for a local independent builder.

How Taxing Are Such Encounters?

Surveyed teachers find situations where they feel their supervisors are nonsupportive both stressful and disconcerting. Of the 250 study participants, 204 claim they have been victims of this kind of administrative behavior. They feared further similar incidents. On a scale of 1 to 5, our colleagues rated this kind of confrontation a 4—more stressful.

5	4	3	2	1
Most stressful	More stressful	Stressful	Little stress	No stress

A Psychological Perspective of This Situation: What Do We Know About Supervisors Who Do Not Support Their Staff? Why Would Vice Principal Hastings Take Such a Position?

We are always in conflict with individuals who undermine our caring and responsibilities. We became teachers because we wanted to edu-

cate students and vicariously share in and enjoy their growth and development. Some of us prefer to teach youngsters, others adolescents, and still others college students. In each situation, we are faced with making decisions about individual students as well as making decisions about the group as a whole. For many of us, making a decision that will adversely affect an individual student is agonizing. We do not want to make that decision. Yet we realize that our decision will help the student change a negative behavior. Before making a difficult decision that affects a student's future, we frequently talk to our peers, seek the counsel of experts, and read books to find insight and guidance. Occasionally, we find it necessary to refer the student to the appropriate team for evaluation. After going to such lengths to act responsibly, the conscientious teacher is understandably frustrated when stopped in his or her tracks.

These facts lead us to examine several points about the above vignette, and in particular Vice Principal Hastings's actions. Who is the "Lost Boy" in this case? Is it Terry O'Malley, Debra Hastings, or David Barber? The allusion to the Lost Boys in Peter Pan is intended as a reminder of how far from reality well-intentioned people, including school administrators, can wander. Ms. Hastings is "just believing" too much. She wants and is willing to believe in something that just is not true.

David's act was no accident. His admission of guilt and claim to "try harder" were dubious, at best. True, David's mother and her significant other seemed to respond to Ms. Hastings's ministrations. Were they sincere, and if so, for how long will they support the school's position? Ms. Hastings lost perspective as an administrator. Schools are not "Never, Never Land." Wishing they were is not going to make it so.

Ms. Hastings lost perspective on when it was time to give up. Perhaps it was because of all her education, soft heart, or inflated faith in available support services. No matter! When a saw blade is thrown across a room with such force that it sticks in a wall, there is something seriously wrong. David made it perfectly clear that he was not going to conform to the rules of society or school. He placed others at risk. Ms. Hastings must understand that there are times when responsible educators must permanently remove a student for the protection of the group.

Finally, Ms. Hastings's decision to return David to the classroom was not only dangerous but ignorant. It is evident that she is unfamiliar with the research that examines students who have been identified as aggressive. Psychology is a science that attempts to study, understand, and predict human behavior. The most difficult of these tasks is the prediction of human behavior. Over time, psychologists have made progress in understanding aggressive behavior. It is estimated that 33% to 50% of all children or adolescents referred to mental health centers have problems controlling their aggressive behavior. They have further demonstrated that there is a high correlation between aggressive behavior in a child and aggressive behavior as an adult. There is also a high correlation between adolescent aggressiveness and adult aggressiveness. Although experts know that an aggressive individual is very likely to be aggressive again, that is different from predicting violent acts with specificity. In short, it is possible to predict that violent behavior will occur repeatedly but impossible to predict the time and nature of the occurrences.

There are many contributing factors to aggressiveness. A history of family problems, drug problems, biological factors, or physical trauma can result in aggressive behavior. These factors are identified by the diagnoses of attention deficit disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, substance abuse, seizure disorder, dementia or bipolar disorder, and several others.

Ms. Hastings should have supported Terry; forced the situation; and protected her students, her teacher, and her own credibility and status among the staff. At the very least, a suspension with a mandatory evaluation by the school psychologist or an outside psychologist or psychiatrist was in order. Preferably, David would not be allowed to return to a regular school setting without an evaluation for dangerousness.

A Practitioner's View: How Well Did the Teacher Handle the Confrontation With the Nonsupportive Superior?

Terry O'Malley's classroom actions seem correct. His belief that David Barber should have been, at the very least, suspended appears justifiable. His indignation and ire with Vice Principal Hastings is under-

standable. But Terry did a very poor job during his meeting with Ms. Hastings. His approach and presentation were terrible. His behavior did nothing to diffuse a hostile situation and achieve an acceptable resolution. Conversely, his actions created hostility and ruined any chance to rectify an unjust course of action.

Although his motives and position were praiseworthy, Terry's methods and behaviors during this confrontation were totally inappropriate and unprofessional. Terry committed a number of grievous mistakes that resulted in serious consequences. Those errors in judgment most worthy of discussion are timing, presentation, personalization, underestimation, and follow-through.

Timing. Terry reacted while still in a state of rage. He never gave himself time to calm down and regain personal control. He never took the time to organize his thoughts, develop a meeting strategy, or identify effective and logical argumentation to support his position. Since the student received a permission slip to return to class, Terry should have recognized in advance that he was not going to get support from Ms. Hastings. In the vernacular, he went off clueless and half-cocked.

Presentation. Throughout the meeting with the vice principal, Terry's words, volume, gestures, and body language were belligerent. He was looking for trouble and he got it. Some examples of Terry's comments and rantings that escalated this meeting into a hostile exchange are the choice of inflammatory words and phrases like "Where do you get off!" "Are you really this ignorant or are you just naturally stupid?" and "Just understand that anything bad that comes of this is on your head!" Inappropriate gestures and body language included stalking into the room, defensively crossing his arms over his chest, shaking his fist, and jumping out of his chair. Unfortunately, Terry's words and actions are classic examples of the behaviors of out-of-control individuals (Berman, 1998; Gordon, 1998; Lewis & Carifio, 1997).

Personalization. Because of his anger, Terry lost sight of the purpose of his meeting with Vice Principal Hastings. The vignette makes it clear that Terry's purpose in requesting a meeting was to convince her to reverse her decision. But caught up in his negative emotions, Terry berated, verbally punished, and attempted to humiliate the new administrator. Throughout this vignette, it is clear that Terry viewed and

treated Ms. Hastings as an enemy rather than a colleague. He approached the situation and their differing opinions as a personal vendetta or war. Was Terry looking for vindication or revenge or was he trying to solve a problem? It appears that he came to this meeting with the "us and them" mentality. Terry was a victim of his own misguided emotions. As Marilee Sprenger (1999) clearly posited, "Emotions . . . are powerful enough to override logical thinking." (p. 86).

Underestimation. Obviously, Terry underestimated the new vice principal's resolve and tenacity. Not to imply that Ms. Hastings's decision to readmit and reinstate the student or her conference behaviors were correct, it is clear that her communications skills and personal control were far superior to those of Terry. When her judgment was questioned and she was personally attacked, she responded as most individuals would respond. Backed into a corner, Ms. Hastings became defensive (Felder, 1994; McEwan, 1998). Terry certainly underestimated her ability to stand up for her position and pose an ultimatum.

Follow-through. Terry's lack of follow-through on his beliefs is probably the most disturbing fact. Certainly, this inaction had the most negative repercussions. Terry's concern for safety in his industrial arts class is praiseworthy. His demand for no tolerance is the norm in similar situations across America. Americans support such stringent procedures where safety is a genuine consideration (Rose & Gallup, 1999). Terry, like any educator who truly believes that a threat to the general safety or an injustice exists, should endeavor to rectify the wrong. Professional and personal ethics demand that Terry should have had the courage to appeal Ms. Hastings's reinstatement decision. (See *The Teachers' Code of Ethics* in Resource A.) Yet he chose to retreat and withdraw from the situation. If Terry thought Vice Principal Hastings was spineless, what about himself? Furthermore, it could be argued that Terry's inaction adversely affected countless others. To speculate: Did his behavior send a negative message to David, who learned he could break the rules and suffer no consequences? What negative social lessons did Terry's pupils learn? How did his lack of commitment to pursue justice affect his peers, the school climate, and education in general? Finally, was Terry's lack of backbone in any way contributory to a 10-year-old's premature death?

A Clinical View

Many children in our society have not been civilized. They have not even been socialized. If they are not controllable or acclimated, and do not accept the first two sets of norms, we cannot expect them to accept school norms. They are children without internal controls. Putting them into a highly energized situation such as an industrial arts class makes it even more difficult for them to cope. They become a danger to themselves and others. As you have read in the earlier section, you can tell we have strong negative feelings about Debra Hastings's behavior. Ms. Hastings made a unilateral decision to return David to the classroom. She chose to ignore David's past and present behavior in order to gain his mother's approval.

A number of conclusions might be drawn from Terry O'Malley's behavior. Obviously, Terry understood his responsibility. He would be the one "on the spot" if the saw blade had struck another student. Terry's request for David's suspension was motivated by his desire to protect the other students.

When Terry read his supervisor's response to his expulsion request, his initial response was understandably anger. More disturbing was Terry's reaction after the confrontation with Ms. Hastings. Apparently, despair set in. Terry became very depressed and withdrawn after this incident. He lost faith in the school and the system. He was no longer willing to work within the system or seek help from others, all because of one misguided administrator. Debra Hastings represented the system in Terry's mind. Knowing that he no longer had Ms. Hastings's respect, Terry believed that he had only one rational choice. He found that he would rather leave a profession he loves dearly than to sell out to Ms. Hastings's "Lost Boys" mentality. Terry recognized that there are times when it is better to move on for one's own well-being.

Additional Suggestions: What Else Could and Should You Do in Similar Situations?

Practical wisdom, our study colleagues, and educational experts all agree that best practices when confronted with a supervisor who does not support our behavior or position are directly opposite of those dis-

played by Terry O'Malley in this vignette. He unfortunately is a prime example of what not to do. Rather, teachers should act as professionals and use the following suggestions.

1. Meet with the errant supervisor only after you have had time to control any negative emotions—anger, defensiveness, disdain, and so on. Time and honest self-reflection are ways to curb unwanted and unproductive feelings. Use the intervening time not only to control yourself but to personally clarify issues, establish priorities, and develop a plan for presenting your case. Ask yourself pertinent questions and then formulate answers that are to your own satisfaction. Examples of fruitful questions are: Exactly what has happened? What is my position in this circumstance? Precisely what do I want changed? Who does this effect and how? Why is this important or damaging? How can this situation be rectified? Why should the current state be altered? What details will support my position?

2. Choose your words wisely in such encounters. Personal attacks, retaliatory remarks, and disparaging and rude references only inflame others and defeat any possibility of satisfactory resolution. Your colleagues strongly urge you to completely refrain from any such verbal exchanges. It is also highly recommended that you monitor and control your voice. They entreat you to pay close attention to volume, timber, and pitch. Keep your voice low, mellow, and conversational during stressful encounters. This practice has a positive, soothing, and comforting effect on others. Finally, remember to use positive active listening skills and body language during these situations. See Chapters 1, 4, and 10 for specific suggestions.

3. Stick to your purpose and the issues in taxing situations. Do not personalize the encounter. Remember that you are a teacher, a professional who deserves respect. Afford your opponent the same consideration. If you treat adversaries with rudeness, disrespect, or disdain, they are likely to respond defensively. Put simply, they have no choice but to dig in and retaliate.

4. Finally, if you feel an injustice has occurred, you must follow through and attempt to change the outcome. Personal morals and professional ethics insist that you be proactive rather than strictly reactive. There are usually several avenues open to solve or resolve a problem. Try them!

Summary

- When you believe that your work efforts are undermined or thwarted by a supervisor, you have an ethical and moral obligation to rectify the situation. In most incidents where your boss deliberately or accidently is nonsupportive, there are a variety of options you can pursue to satisfactorily resolve the situation. Use the avenues available to you.
- When a disagreement between you and your superior occurs, behave professionally and impersonally. Remember, colleagues may disagree and still resolve a problem. Your boss, like you, deserves to be treated with courtesy and respect.
- When it is necessary to confront your superordinate with a genuine grievance, use appropriate timing, presentation techniques, and depersonalizing.

Suggested Reading

Sprenger, M. (1999). *Learning and memory: The brain in action.* Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

References

Berman, S. (1998). The bridge to civility: Empathy, ethics, and service. *The School Administrator, 4,* 52-58.

Felder, L. (1994, October 15). How to deal with difficult people at work. *Bottom Line/Personal,* p. 13. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

Gordon, R. (1998). Balancing real-world problems with real-world results. *Phi Delta Kappan, 79*(4), 390-394.

Lewis, M. L., & Carifio, J. (1997). Ratings of assault vignettes. *Journal of Research in Education, 7*(1), 40-47.

McEwan, E. K. (1998). *How to deal with parents who are angry, afraid, or just plain crazy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (1999). The 31st annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*(1), 41-56.

Sprenger, M. (1999). *Learning and memory: The brain in action.* Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

10

What Works

The 15 Most Often Used Strategies for Difficult, Frustrating, or Hostile Conversations

From the previous nine chapters, it becomes apparent that there are some practices or strategies that are helpful in most difficult situations. Having a mental list of those techniques would be most helpful to all teachers. We could be much more efficient at defusing unwanted and unnecessary hostile conversations if we learned what actually works. But what strategies do practicing educators find most valuable? Research was required.

To determine which strategies successful and effective teacher-leaders use most often during hostile conversations, 250 practicing educators were surveyed. They were asked the following: "What three suggestions would you give a teacher, a friend, who had to engage in

---

AUTHORS' NOTE: The quotations in this chapter for which specific sources are not cited were taken from the collections listed in the References.

hostile conversations with adults?" Their responses were sorted and grouped by topic, and then their suggestions were rank-ordered. The participants recommended 15 strategies, or best practices, they found most helpful.

Amazingly, all of these "modern-day" strategies are actually age-old practices espoused by past generations. There are no surprises. We know these truths. Most of us learned these strategies at the knee of a parent or grandparent in the form of adages, proverbs, or aphorisms. Success when dealing with oral confrontations appears proportionate to one's ability to apply these long-known strategies to the new situations we face today. What we must learn is how to apply them to tense verbal exchanges (Kosmoski, 1999). Consider and apply these top 15 strategies when engaged in hostile conversations.

1. *Gather pertinent information.* When dealing with hostile adults, it is most advantageous to have solid, accurate information about the circumstances prior to the encounter. Teachers and administrators must share pertinent and relevant information. A professional and positive working environment encourages all staff members to share information regarding potentially volatile or hostile situations, to report any suspicion of trouble, and to communicate between themselves with candor. Staff can and should inform their bosses that they would like to be apprised of all complaints made concerning them. Often, supervisors hesitate to involve a teacher until the situation cannot be rectified without the teacher's cooperation and input. Administrators erroneously believe that by removing the teacher from the information loop, they are protecting him or her from an unnecessary and perhaps unpleasant and upsetting experience. Also, many teachers receive information about potential complaints in a nonprofessional manner. To encourage bosses to share all news, not just good news, you must learn to receive warnings in a professional manner. You must not overreact, personalize, or become irrationally defensive. Open communication has many benefits. Forewarned, you will have the time to gather pertinent information and verify facts. Effective teachers would rather prepare for 10 hostile conversations that do not materialize than be unprepared for one that does.

Forewarned is forearmed. (Cervantes)

Knowledge is power. (Francis Bacon)

2. *Defer action.* One of the best techniques for resolving problems is to defer action until all parties are calm. Little is accomplished when an individual is agitated or out of control. Postpone confrontational conversations until you understand all the circumstances and the hostile adult has had time to calm down and rethink his or her position. Tell the person that you understand that his or her concern is serious and genuine. Acknowledge that you are upset and you need time to calm down. Explain to the furious individual that you need to move the meeting to a later date so there will be ample time to address his or her concerns. Do not equate delaying tactics with avoidance. Your purpose is not to run from trouble but rather to solve a problem or dispute. Ample time is necessary to reach a satisfactory resolution (Neirenberg, 1981). Given time to temper hostile emotions, the angry individual will be more rational and generally more amenable to your point of view.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. (Alexander Pope)

Timing is everything. (George Burns)

3. *Refuse to be baited.* It is unnecessary to verbally attack or retaliate when engaged in conversation. It is more difficult for an individual to threaten, curse, yell, or scream if the opposition chooses not to exhibit like behaviors. Usually, after an initial onslaught, the furious individual begins to calm down if you do not fuel the anger. A calm, controlled demeanor during verbal attacks is a powerful tool. Courtesy is rewarded (Cartwright & Schwartz, 1987). Remember, you are the professional who sets the tone. If you wish to have your opponent behave in a certain manner, it is useful to have a simple plan. One such plan is to use a mnemonic memory device suggested in *Quantum Teaching: Orchestrating Student Success,* by Deporter, Reardon, and Singer-Nourie (1998). This memory device is called *O*pen *t*he *F*ront *D*oor, which stands for

Observation > Thought > Feeling > Desire

An example of putting this sequence in practice might be, "I noticed that this matter is very important to you (Observation). It's good that you wanted to do something about this (Thought). It makes me happy that you came directly to me (Feeling). I hope we can work this out together (Desire)."

It takes two to make a fight. (Unknown)

Fools bite one another, but wise men agree together. (George Herbert)

Wisdom has taught us to be calm and meek, to take one blow and turn the other cheek. (Oliver W. Holmes)

4. *Compile a response list.* Educators who are consistently successful at defusing volatile conversations mentally compile a list of positive and nonthreatening responses to use during uncomfortable discussions. These statements are designed to express concern, sincerity, reasonableness, and empathy. Examples of such responses include, "I can understand your concern. . . ," "*We* need to. . . ," "I appreciate your effort. . . ," and "How can I help?" Take a few minutes to formulate your own personal list of calming responses. Steven Stahl (1999) points out that individuals have their own personal styles that influence their decision making and verbal expression. So, select those responses that are most appropriate for you. Over time, you may add or delete individual phrases to or from your memory bank. Review your mental list periodically so that the responses become more familiar and comfortable to you. Then, when a tense situation occurs, you will be prepared with responses that are natural to you and have the effect you wish.

Honey catches more flies than vinegar. (Franklin Praimanac)

5. *Learn to apologize.* When a conversation confirms that a constituent has been genuinely wronged, you must apologize. This is not an easy task. Many of us were taught that admitting fault is a sign of weakness. Untrue. Sincere contrition should be perceived as a strength, rather than a weakness (Tannen, 1995). Our colleagues also suggest that using the phrase "I'm sorry" has a positive effect on those who are verbally attacking you. Even if you have no reason or intent to apologize, you can use the phrase "I'm sorry" to your advantage. Expressing regret that an angry adult feels the way he or she does has a calming effect. Try, "I'm sorry you feel this way" or "I'm sorry you have to do this." These statements do not compromise your position and yet they express comfort and empathy. Remember that insincere apologies are most often detected by others. People view these comments as demeaning and manipulative. Be sincere. *Quantum Teaching: Orchestrating Student Success* again provides a mnemonic saying and formula to remember when offering a sincere apology (Deporter,

Reardon, & Singer-Nourie, 1998): *A*ll *A*bout *M*y *R*elationship, the four-part apology, which stands for

Acknowledge > Apologize > Make it right > Recommit

An example of this type of apology is, "You're right (Acknowledgment). I'm sorry I did that (Apology). I'll do my best to fix this (Make it right). I won't let this happen again (Recommit)."

It takes a big person to say, "I'm sorry." (Unknown)

The man who is sorry over the fact will win. (Lao Tzu)

We must be heartily sorry for misdoings. (St. Matthew)

6. *Listen to body messages.* Be aware of what your body tells you. During heated conversations, do not ignore or disdain butterflies in the stomach, an increase in heart rate, and other mild signs of stress. Savvy teachers view these physical changes as an advance warning system of possible danger. Heed your body and remain alert.

Fear is a good copilot. (M. Scott Carpenter)

Fear is the beginning of wisdom. (Unknown)

7. *Develop a plan to get help.* Before any potentially dangerous incidents occur, develop a plan for seeking help. Prudent teachers prepare for true emergencies. Volatile conversations can escalate into physical encounters. Formulate your personal plan for summoning help. Hesitation can have devastating consequences. Encourage your administrators and safety committee to develop a schoolwide plan for requesting assistance using predetermined signs, gestures, or phrases as cues for action. Here is one example. When danger seems more a probability than a possibility, a teacher might buzz the school office to cancel an appointment with Mr. Raven. In this case, the word *Raven* serves as the "trigger" or "cue word" for the secretary to call authorities. Prepared faculties develop danger plans that include procedures, methods, individual responsibilities, and assignments. They resolve issues of chain of command, locations, and alternatives and agree on each procedure in detail.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. (Scammell)

To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace. (George Washington)

8. *Get a grip.* Effective teachers control themselves before ever trying to control the situation. This is not an easy task. When we feel anger, frustration, disgust, or fear, our bodies react and make it difficult to think and act professionally. If we use the techniques for reducing stress, our bodies, and therefore our minds, will be less affected. Try the proven remedies of deep breathing, relaxing tense muscles, counting to 10, and active listening.

Think before you speak. (William Shakespeare)

9. *Be selective when speaking.* There are times when you are privy to much more information than the person who confronts you. Our peers advise that you share *only* pertinent and germane facts with the hostile individual. They caution you to avoid blurting out unnecessary and peripheral facts and details. Providing the hostile individual with additional or unrelated information might confuse the issue and make defusing the situation more difficult. Also, giving the person additional facts might increase or fuel his or her negative emotions. Educators too often believe that it is our "duty" to impart knowledge. This is a misconception. We do not have to mention everything we know. By contrast, there are those occasions where supplying additional and appropriate information clarifies matters and helps resolve the conflict. Effective teachers must be thoughtful and use good judgment when sharing information.

Don't open a can of worms. (Unknown)

If you open Pandora's Box, you never know what Trojan horses will appear. (Ernest Bevin)

10. *Recognize enemies and dissenters.* All of us have been faced with individuals who, for whatever reason, wish to damage our image, credibility, or reputation. They twist the meaning of our words or invent their own meanings. They embellish or exaggerate the truth. They spew venomous remarks every time our names are mentioned. These people are often the school gossips or naysayers. If you recognize them for what they are, and how they can hurt you and your reputation, you can defend yourself. A prudent practice is to avoid conversations with such persons. There is no law that requires you to talk to them. Why waste your time! Why help them malign you!

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. (Unknown)

Fools grow without watering. (Thomas Fuller)

11. *Speak softly.* Our colleagues suggest that you literally speak softly when engaged in hostile conversations. They advise you to use a low, calm voice during heated or tense verbal exchanges. Peers suggest that you make clear, reasonable, and concise statements during unpleasant confrontations. The content of your words, then, becomes the "big stick." How you say something is often as important as what you say. Volume, voice, and content must be your strengths when dealing with hostile adults.

Speak softly but carry a big stick. (Teddy Roosevelt)

12. *Develop listening skills.* Active listening skills aid us in hostile conversation. Paraphrasing and reiteration affirm understanding. Responses beginning with, "Do you mean . . . ," "Let me see if I understand . . . ," and "Are you saying . . . " are excellent verbal tools. Pointed, nonaccusing questions dispel confusion and clarify misunderstandings. Examples of useful questions are "What exactly did you see?" "Can you give me more details?" and "What was the sequence of events?" Affirmative nodding and gentle interjections, such as "oh," "yes," and "ah," can give your opposition the courage to continue and reaffirms your interest and concern.

Listen, not just hear. (Unknown)

Attention, attention must be paid to others. (Arthur Miller)

13. *Use credible third-party witnesses or experts.* If you have reason to expect an unpleasant meeting or heated discussion, bring one or several witnesses. The presence of others often acts as its own deterrent. In many cases, an agitated or angry individual will voluntarily monitor and temper his or her behavior if there are observers. The third party also acts as a safeguard when a question about or interpretation of an event is necessary after the confrontation. Some appropriate witnesses or experts include a fellow teacher, a division chair, or an administrator.

Two are better than one. (Ecclesiastes 4:9)

Oh, to have the strength of twenty men. (William Shakespeare)

There is strength in numbers. (Unknown)

14. *Remain detached.* Do not personalize an attack. When individuals vent, whine, or rave, it usually has little to do with you personally. Rather, these behaviors are an expression of their own inabilities. They are frustrated, angry, unempowered. They do not view *you* as the leader, friend, parent, or spouse. In heated exchanges, the aggressor usually thinks of you, the teacher, as the authority figure.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. (Mother Goose)

15. *Move on.* There are times when we must admit we did not handle a hostile conversation well. We might have been more effective in defusing a situation. After the fact, the best you can do is learn from the mistakes and move on. Excessive rumination and personal chastisement are unproductive. Get on with the business at hand and do it better the next time.

Don't cry over spilt milk. (Andrew Yamanton)

Don't spit into the wind. (Jim Croce)

Don't let your heart rule your head. (Unknown)

Each of the above suggestions is important and worth recalling during times when we are engaged in heated or unpleasant conversations. But how can you remember so much, and at the same time hold up your end of a discussion? Easy. Just recall those old adages learned when you were so young and impressionable. The sayings will stick in your mind with little effort and serve as the trigger to fill in the details. Here, again, are the adages. They are repeated with key words highlighted to aid your remembering. One simple memory technique is to put each on an index card and study it.

- ***Forewarned** is forearmed. No surprise is a good surprise.*
- ***Timing** is everything. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.*
- ***It takes two** to make a fight.*
- ***Honey** catches more flies than vinegar.*
- *It takes a big person to say, **"I'm sorry."***
- ***Fear is a good copilot.***

- *An ounce of **prevention** is worth a pound of cure.*
- ***Think** before you speak.*
- *Don't open a **can of worms**.*
- ***Fool me once,** shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.*
- ***Speak softly** but carry a big stick.*
- ***Listen,** not just hear.*
- *There is **strength in numbers**.*
- ***Sticks and stones** may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.*
- *Don't cry over **spilt milk**.*

Skill in communicating is essential in our profession. Learn from other practitioners. Heed the advice of your peers. These 15 strategies or best practices are powerful tools to use during hostile conversations with adults at school. The wisdom of the past can serve your present needs. If you can successfully apply these strategies during hostile conversations, you will become a more effective educational leader today as you enter the new millennium.

Suggested Readings

Deporter, B., Reardon, M., & Singer-Nourie, S. (1998). *Quantum teaching: Orchestrating student success.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Kosmoski, G. (1999). Defusing a conversation that turns hostile. *The School Administrator, 3*(56), 35.

Tannen, D. (1995). *Talking from 9 to 5. Women and men in the workplace: Language, sex and power.* New York: Avon.

References

Bartlett, J. (1980). *Familiar quotations: A collection of passages, and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Cartwright, G., & Schwartz, A. (1987). *The school official's guide to student discipline hearings.* Springfield: Illinois Association of School Boards.

Chambers, A. (Ed.). (1997). *Chambers dictionary of quotations*. New York: Chambers.

Deporter, B., Reardon, M., & Singer-Nourie, S. (1998). *Quantum teaching: Orchestrating student success*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Kosmoski, G. (1999). Defusing a conversation that turns hostile. *The School Administrator, 3*(56), 35.

Macmillan dictionary of quotations. (1989). New York: Macmillan.

Meider, W., Kingsbury, S. A., Harder, K. (1992). *A dictionary of American proverbs*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Neirenberg, G. I. (1981). *The art of negotiating*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Oxford dictionary of quotations. (1979). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Sherrin, N. (Ed.). (1995). *The Oxford dictionary of humorous quotations*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Simpson, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Simpson's contemporary quotations: The most notable quotes from 1950 to the present*. New York: HarperCollins.

Stahl, S. A. (1999). Different strokes for different folks? *American Educator, 23*(3), 27-31.

Tannen, D. (1995). *Talking from 9 to 5. Women and men in the workplace: Language, sex and power*. New York: Avon.

RESOURCE A

The Teachers' Code of Ethics

Ten Practices by Which to Live Your Professional Life
Developed by G. Kosmoski and D. Pollack

The Professional Teacher Shall Be:

- An educational leader
- Committed to education
- Knowledgeable
- Visionary
- Empowering
- Trustworthy
- Supportive of high expectations
- A skilled communicator
- Accessible and available
- An active community member

Besides identifying the 10 areas that must be addressed by the professional teacher, our educational colleagues described the characteristics that mark each practice. They are as follows:

1. The Teacher Is an Educational Leader.

Characteristics of the EDUCATIONAL Leader

The individual consistently demonstrates the personal virtues of honesty, forthrightness, fairness, loyalty, compassion, kindness,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

thoughtfulness, bravery, humility, appropriateness, politeness, and trustworthiness.

The individual consistently demonstrates the professional qualities of vision, knowledge, trust building, decisiveness, motivation, consistency, creativity, focus, open-mindedness, flexibility, stamina, positivity, punctuality, and a sense of humor.

2. The Teacher Is Committed to Education.

Characteristics of the COMMITTED Teacher

Focuses on the needs of the students
Puts the education of students before any other consideration
Places educational priorities before personal needs and agendas
Works to maintain and improve an educational program that is student-centered

3. The Teacher Is Knowledgeable.

Characteristics of the KNOWLEDGEABLE Teacher

Has the proper education and licensing
Takes classes or attends workshops to remain current
Reads constantly—educational books, journals, reports, legal updates, etc.
Participates in professional organizations, conferences, and seminars
Keeps apprised of local, state, and national events and trends
Freely shares information and knowledge with constituents

4. The Teacher Is Visionary.

Characteristics of the VISIONARY Teacher

Develops long- and short-range goals to enhance student performance
Promotes the good for the many
Projects future trends
Identifies high quality/long-lasting practices
Prioritizes goals and activities

5. The Teacher Empowers Students.

Characteristics of the EMPOWERING Teacher

Provides opportunities for student decision making
Encourages student leadership
Promotes students' personal and group responsibility
Promotes students' ownership of their own education
Acknowledges and praises students' accomplishments

6. **The Teacher Is Trustworthy.**

Characteristics of the TRUSTWORTHY Teacher
Follows through on promises in a timely manner
Keeps confidences
Does not crumble under pressure
Means and does what she or he says
Remains loyal in difficult circumstances

7. **The Teacher Supports High Yet Achievable Expectations.**

Characteristics of the HIGH-EXPECTATION Teacher
Sets high expectations and standards for him- or herself
Believes that all students can learn and excel
Believes in the professionalism of colleagues
Expects unequivocal support and effort from the school community
Models and encourages good attendance

8. **The Teacher Is a Skilled Communicator.**

Characteristics of the COMMUNICATING Teacher
Sends home regular newsletters, brag sheets, and information updates
Provides appropriate homework assignments
Successfully uses technology such as parent/student telephone hotlines, weekend voice mail, radio/television news spots, and e-mail updates, congratulation messages, etc.
Regularly confers with colleagues, superordinates, community volunteers, parents, and support staff
Provides opportunities for parental and community involvement in classroom activities

9. **The Teacher Is Available and Accessible.**

Characteristics of the AVAILABLE Teacher

Provides opportunities to meet with students during unscheduled teaching and learning times
Returns calls promptly
Attends school functions and extracurricular activities
Demonstrates flexibility when asked to confer

10. The Teacher Is an Active Community Member.

Characteristics of the ACTIVE COMMUNITY Member
Participates in civic functions
Joins and attends civic organizations
Assumes leadership roles in community activities

NOTE: 250 participants—50 aspiring teachers, 150 veteran teachers and 50 practicing school administrators—from various settings and locations were asked to list the behaviors and practices of the ideal teacher. The above code is a compilation and synthesis of their responses. The study was conducted at Governors State University in University Park, IL.

CORWIN
PRESS

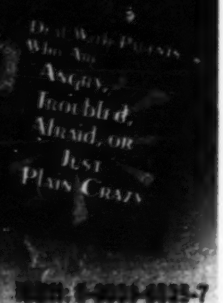
The Corwin Press logo—a raven striding across an open book—represents the happy union of courage and learning. We are a professional-level publisher of books and journals for K–12 educators, and we are committed to creating and providing resources that embody these qualities. Corwin's motto is "Success for All Learners."

Now you can identify and apply the proven strategies to deal successfully with hostile adults in schools.

Managing Conversations With Hostile Adults

John Bruno ,Ph D

Georgia J. Kosmoski Dennis R. Pollack



ISBN: 0-8039-6885-7

ISBN: 0-8039-6811-6

CORWIN PRESS, INC.
A Sage Publications Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218
E-mail: order@corwinpress.com
Call: 805-499-9774 Fax: 800-4-1-SCHOOL
www.corwinpress.com

BEST COPY AVAILABLE